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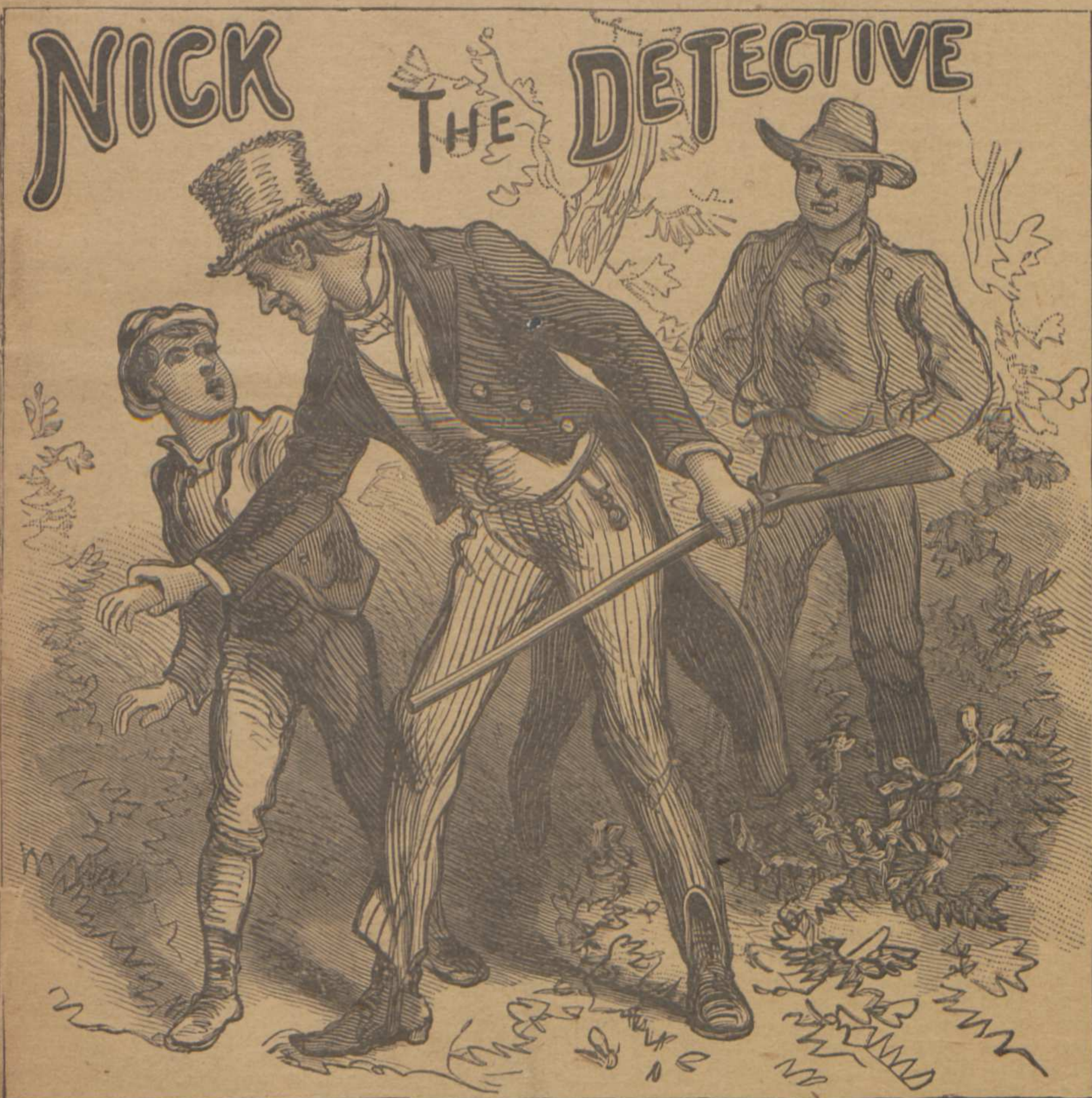
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NICK THE DETECTIVE



"HOLD ON, YOUNKER," SAID NICK. "IT'S THE OPINION O' THIS COON 'UT YE'LL BE A DEAL SAFER BY STAYIN' WITH US."

Nick, the Detective;

OR,

The BORDER VAGABOND'S DOOM.

BY EDWIN EMERSON.

CHAPTER I.

BACKWOODS JUSTICE.

AMONG the earliest settlements of Kentucky was that which figures in our story. At the time of the following events it contained some fifty dwellings, surrounded by strong palisades to defend them from the savages, besides a well-constructed block-house, which was not only strongly garrisoned, but claimed the additional protection of a brass field-piece.

One bright afternoon, early in the month of August, there was an unusual commotion at the Indian frontier post.

The entire population, men and women, old and young, had assembled on a broad, level spot just beyond the limits of the fort, many of them to look upon a scene such as they had never before witnessed. This spot was known as "the green," and it was where the youth of the settlement were wont to repair for their sports, but those gathered there now wore sad faces, and conversed with each other in low, serious tones. And well they might, for they were there to see a man hung for murder!

Russell Trafford was one of the most honored and highly esteemed young men of the place, and yet, on this bright August afternoon, he was to be put to death for the willful murder of another person, who had enjoyed a like reputation. Being an orphan, the young man had lived with his uncle, Doctor Trafford, in the largest and most substantial cabin in the settlement, the worthy doctor being a kind but eccentric individual, who could not have loved his nephew more had the latter been a son instead. These two had never been known to be at odds until very recently, and in fact the peace, harmony and happiness with which they had always lived together, had been a subject of remark on more than one occasion.

But one night, at a late hour, an alarm of fire was raised. The excited settlers, rushing out of their houses, made the startling discovery that the dwelling of Doctor Trafford was in flames. Arriving on the scene, the only person they found there was Russell Trafford. The young man was standing in front of the burning structure, with an open tinder-box in his hand, gazing up at the flames, pale and silent. When spoken to he started violently, and then, quickly thrusting the tinder-box in his pocket, he clasped his hands and cried out in tones of mental anguish, that his poor uncle was dead—murdered—burned alive in his own house! Somebody asked him how he came to be outside of the cabin with an open tinder-box in his hand, and he replied in an absent sort of a way, that he didn't know—the box was not his—he had found it, he supposed, and begged them to let him alone.

The idea of the esteemed Doctor Trafford be-

ing burned to death in his own house and bed, aroused the indignation of all. Somebody had done the deed, and somebody must suffer for it; and the finger of circumstantial evidence pointed to the victim's nephew, Russell, as the guilty one. Suspicion was fastened strongly upon him, despite the good name he had hitherto borne.

Russell Trafford was arrested, and allowed to go through a mock trial. An Irish boy named Mike Terry—a lad of some fourteen summers, who had lived with the doctor in the capacity of servant—testified that Russell and his uncle had quarreled on the morning preceding the tragedy, and, moreover, that he himself had seen Russell set fire to the building, and he (Mike) had barely escaped with his own life.

This was sufficient. Russell Trafford was declared guilty of firing the cabin with intent to kill his uncle, and he was sentenced to be "hanged by the neck, until dead." And the sunny afternoon in question was set apart for the punishment of the offender, and many of those who gathered on the green to witness the execution wore sorrowful faces as they looked on the doomed man for the last time.

The executioner was an old hunter, ranger and scout, who gloried in the euphonious appellation of Kirby Kidd. Grizzled old borderman that he was, fearless, true-hearted and kind, he formed a good specimen of his class, and his sturdy, Herculean frame showed to good advantage as he stood at his post.

There was still a third party on the scaffold. This was a friendly Wyandott Indian, of the name of Wapawah, who was the constant companion of Kirby Kidd when hunting or on the trail, and who had rendered valuable service to many of the frontier posts along the Ohio. Wapawah was as brave a warrior as ever trod Kentucky soil, and possessed all the cunning vindictiveness and reticence, characteristic of his race. Just now he stood beside his white friend like an image carved in bronze, with his arms folded over his tawny breast, watching the proceedings in stoical silence.

While the spectators were waiting nervously for the *finale*, the attention of many was attracted to a rather curious-looking individual, who suddenly made his appearance among them. This was a man of medium size, clad in the ordinary garb of a hunter and ranger, who trailed after him a long, black rifle as he walked. There was not the sign of an expression on the fellow's face. A red, straggling beard covered his mouth and chin; long hair of the same color brushed his shoulders at every movement of his head; an ugly patch disfigured his left cheek; and a rough bandage concealed his right eye. Altogether his was not the most prepossessing face ever seen. Nobody seemed to know him, nor did he return any of the searching glances directed at him. He was pressing through the crowd toward the scaffold, looking neither to the right nor left, but straight ahead.

When the stranger had pushed himself through the wondering throng, he unhesitatingly ascended to the elevated platform, and confronted Kirby Kidd, the hangman. For some minutes the two hunters conversed together in low, earnest tones, the friendly Indian standing near, and

evidently drinking in every word that was uttered.

Then the hangman spoke out loudly, exclaiming:

"Wal, Nick, ye know it's my way. I allers try to do my duty, whether it be pleasant or no."

"Sart'inly, Kidd," returned the person called Nick. "Go ahead an' string the cuss up. I know yer wouldn't have nothin' to do with the thing ef yer thought he didn't deserve it."

With this, the stranger with the bandaged eye turned and descended to the ground, still dragging his gun after him. Wapawab, the Wyandott, followed him, and the two withdrew to a spot apart from the crowd, where they might talk unheard.

A few of the settlers went forward to shake the hand of the young convict, and bid him a last farewell. Among these were three persons who attracted considerable attention—a man and two women. They were Mr. Moreland, his wife and daughter. Mr. Moreland was one of the first men of the settlement, a sensible, industrious and stout-hearted pioneer. He had a wife, kind, charitable and self-sacrificing, and their daughter resembled them both. In point of beauty, Isabel Moreland certainly had no superior in all Kentucky. She was the betrothed of Russell Trafford, and people had said they would make an excellent match, but that was all over now, and here stood the young man under the gallows, on the eve of a felon's death, while his affianced wife wept bitterly as he bid her a final adieu.

This affecting scene over, Russell Trafford was asked if he had anything to say before dying. He replied that he desired a very brief hearing, and then stepped to the edge of the scaffold to speak. He was strangely calm and collected, and his voice was clear, steady, and distinct. He said:

"Friends and former friends: it affords me extreme happiness to know that there are those among you who still have faith in my innocence, in spite of all evidence to the contrary. On the heads of such I invoke the blessing of God as I die. For you who believe me guilty I bear no malice, nor even reproach, but trust that a just Heaven will undeceive you after I am gone and bring the true offender to the retribution he deserves. I am ready to die."

He stepped back as he made this last declaration, and the old ranger immediately placed the death-cap over his head.

Russell Trafford was hung before the eyes of his former friends and the grieved maiden who had promised to become his wife. The body of the young man was lowered from the gallows and placed in the coffin that awaited it, which was nothing more than a rude pine box constructed for this purpose. Old Kirby Kidd, the Wyandott Indian, and their friend, Nick Robins, volunteered to take the corpse in custody until the morrow, and protect it from the enraged mob, who, it was feared, not being satisfied with the murderer's death, would further vent its wrath upon the dead body.

On the following day a grave was dug in a pretty glade just outside of the settlement, and burial services were performed.

CHAPTER II.

JONATHAN BOGGS, FROM MAINE.

ISABEL MORELAND stood in the doorway of her father's cabin one morning two or three days after the execution of her lover, Russell Trafford. She was very pale, but very calm. The roses, which had been the admiration of all, were gone from her cheeks, and her dark, soulful eyes, which had been the particular admiration of her ill-fated lover, were hollow and unusually large.

Presently a man sauntered up to the door, attracted thither by the charming one who stood there. He was a big, burly fellow, with the brute plainly stamped on his coarse, red face, and an air of reckless depravity about him that proclaimed him anything else but a man. He wore a slouched hat, pulled carelessly down on one side of his head, completely hiding his right eye. This was Jim McCabe, the veriest bully and profligate in the settlement, who, it was said, was so devoid of principle that no piece of deviltry was too great for him to commit. He had been one of Russell Trafford's rivals in love, and of all the rivals he had been compelled to contend with, Russell had regarded Jim McCabe as the most insignificant. But, now that his successful competitor was out of the way, McCabe seemed to think it possible to thrust himself into the vacant place, and seeing her this morning at the door of her home, he determined to seize the opportunity of renewing the contest for the much-coveted hand and heart.

"Good-morrow, Miss Moreland," said he, with a profound bow, and an attempt to smile pleasantly.

"Well, sir?" returned the girl, coldly.

"Perfectly well, I thank you," replied the rogue, choosing to misconstrue her words. "But, really, Miss Moreland, you are looking decidedly unwell to-day. What can be the matter, if I may ask? Are you ill?"

"Not particularly."

"No? Now, that is strange. One would suppose that you had just risen from a prolonged illness. You see I am naturally concerned for the health of one so dear to me. By the way, that was a sad affair about Doctor Trafford and his ingrate of a nephew, wasn't it?—a sad affair all around. As a friend, I feel for you deeply, but I think you were fortunate in thus finding out the character of your intended husband before—"

"Sir, I must trouble you to drop this subject now and forever."

Isabel Moreland turned her flashing eyes upon the man as she spoke, and gave him a look that made him recoil. But, quickly recovering himself, he replied, in a tone of apology:

"Why, I did not suspect that I was treading forbidden ground. I only wished to express my sympathy for you, and you certainly need it, since your favored suitor has proven himself only fit to grace the end of a rope."

"If you have come here to jeer and mock at me, you must continue your insults without my presence," interrupted our heroine, and so saying she entered the house, and quietly closed the door between her and her tormentor.

Jim McCabe ground his teeth with rage. Was this to be the result of the new game he had so

hopefully commenced? Did she, then, hate him so bitterly? and was her love for Russell Trafford so great that his death had produced this marked change in her lovely face? But Jim McCabe was not the man to submit thus tamely. He shook his fist at the door which shut the maiden from his view, and muttered:

"This is all very fine, my proud lady, but the time is not far off when you will look at Jim McCabe with a much softer expression in those eyes. I have played none but my loose cards as yet, but there are trumps to follow that are certain to win, and two weeks shall not pass away before I shall have the pleasure of seeing this haughty jade at my feet."

He hissed the last words through his clinched teeth, and his usually red face grew still redder with anger.

He was walking away from the spot, when a peculiar voice behind him arrested his footsteps.

"Hello, you! Jest draw rein a minute, ef you please."

Instinctively guessing that he was the one accosted, McCabe stopped to see who the presumptuous person was. A tall, angular specimen of humanity, with long, dangling legs and ungainly feet, was coming toward him with awkward strides. He was an utter stranger to McCabe, but the latter saw at a glance that he was a Yankee, of the raw sort, evidently just from his native State. His dress alone would have proven that fact, to say nothing of the nasal twang in his voice, and the "down-East" peculiarity of speech. He wore a tall, white hat, the nap of which stuck straight out; a pair of striped trowsers, which clung tenaciously to the awkward members they protected; and a blue, threadbare coat, whose swallow-tails reached nearly to his heels.

"How d'ye dew, stranger?" drawled the specimen, as he came up. "Right nice weather we're havin' nowadays, ain't it?"

"Splendid. But what do you want of me?"

"What dew I want? Law, now, you're jest like all the rest o' the Western folks—want a feller tew come tew the pint instanter, without the least bit o' prevaricatin' or dodgin' round the stump, as Tabitha Simpson used to say. Tabitha Simpson was my third cousin, stranger, on my mother's side, a gal o' the feminine persuasion, by the way, and I swan tew man, there never was a couple in all Christendom as had more fun than Tabitha and me used to have. There was one time in partic'lar—"

"See here," interposed McCabe, crustily, "before you continue your nonsense, I should like to know who you are?"

"Me? Darn my buttons! Mother allus said I was the most forgetful child she had, and I'm forever provin' the fact to myself in this very way. Me? Why, bless you, I'm Jonathan Boggs, all the way from Maine! Jonathan Boggs, stranger, a first-rate feller on the whole, who was considered the smartest member of his father's family, until he robbed neighbor Green's hen-roost and had to turn tail on the old humstead."

Jim McCabe began to regard the Yankee with some curiosity.

"When did you arrive here, Mr. Boggs?" he inquired.

"I brought up in this hamlet yesterday," replied the Yankee, squeezing his hands with difficulty into the pockets of his "tights."

"Yesterday," repeated the other. "It may seem strange to you, but I really think I have seen your face somewhere."

"Dew tell! I s'pect you have, mister, for I often go there," said the "specimen," with provoking coolness. "As Tabitha Simpson used to say, 'Cousin Jonathan must be known to be liked,' and I'm glad to l'arn as how my phiz ain't unfamiliar tew you—"

But Jim McCabe was too thoroughly exasperated by the *sang froid* of his interlocutor to let him go on in this strain.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, "if you have anything of importance to say, I wish to hear it at once."

"Want to know?" returned the stranger, elevating his eyebrows. "Now that's what I call downright mean, bluffin' a chap off in that 'ere style, when he's talkin' 'bout the land of his birth and old-time associations. I find I can't talk enough to please you, but I calculate you'll 'scuse me on the score that natur' neglected to put the gift o' gab in my blamed noddle."

"Now, in that respect, I ain't one iotum like the old woman, 'cause why? she can talk the ha'r right off o' your head in three jerks of a 'possum's ear; and ef you's with her from Sunday mornin' till Saturday night, you wouldn't find a chance to crowd in a word edgewise. But I did forgit my business, that's a fact; thereby givin' further proof that mother told no lie when she said as how I was eternally disrememberin' every blamed thing of importance. But now tew the pint, as Tabitha allus said, when tellin' one o' her long-winded yarns. Tabitha had been chil'ern's nuss at some time of her life, and so had acquired a habit o' story-tellin' that clung to her through the hull course of her existence—"

"Curse you for an idiot!" growled McCabe, irascibly, and with an oath he started away.

"Hold on, mister," said Jonathan Boggs, coolly laying his hand on the other's shoulder. "Don't go off 'thout hearin' me through."

"Hands off, scoundrel!" commanded the settler, fiercely. "I'll knock you down if you repeat this insult."

"I wouldn't dew that, mister, I swow I wouldn't! It takes such a hard lick to knock me down that ye might cripple your hand for life. Besides, when I was a boy it wa'n't considered healthy tew undertake sech a rash job, and even now you might not be dewin' the right thing toward yourself."

Jim McCabe was a coward, like all other bullies. So these words, and the manner in which they were uttered, alarmed him not a little.

"Who the deuce are you, anyway?" he demanded, sullenly.

"Jonathan Boggs, from Maine," was the quiet reply.

"And your business with me?"

"Now that's what I've been trying to tell you all along, but you wouldn't listen. I sell clocks for a livelihood. I've rented a room in the block-house yonder, and by Jupiter! it's e'na—"

most filled up with my clocks. Reckon you'll buy a clock, won't you?"

"Fool!"

McCabe stamped his foot with vexation, and again turned on his heel to leave his persecutor. But again that opposing hand was laid on his shoulder, and he was once more detained against his will.

"Ain't you gwine to buy a clock?" asked the Yankee. "I tell you, mister, they're the nicest thing under the sun, and jest presactly what you want. I swow, by gravy, it's the most complete invention in existence. Why, the man as made them clocks *died*. He was tew confounded smart tew live—"

"Stop!" said the settler, imperatively. "I don't wish to buy, and you will oblige me by discontinuing the subject."

"You don't tell me! Wal, I don't wish to impose on the patience of an indulgent audience. I've sold so many clocks since I come that I ain't sp'ilin' for your patronage nohow, so we'll drap the topic. I say, mister, that was a bad thing 'bout your feller-citizen, Doctor Trafford, bein' killed in his own house, wa'n't it?"

"It was, indeed," was the brief answer.

"It was, sure's shootin'," continued the Yankee; "but the wu'st part o' the hull sarcumstance was the awful mistake of arrestin' the doctor's own nephew, and hangin' him for the murder."

"Mistake!" echoed McCabe, looking sharply at the speaker. "Why, sir, there was no mistake about it. Russell Trafford was found guilty before he was punished. He *did* do the deed."

"Did he, though? Now, that beats me. I s'pose you was there, and see'd him dew it?"

"Not I, sir, but a small boy, who had been in the doctor's employ, saw the doctor's nephew set fire to the building."

"Wal, the lad might have been bribed tew tell all that, you know. I've hearn the hull story two or three times, and I hope I may be shot for a chicken-thief if the young man done the job."

"Dare you assert that he did not do it?"

"Yas."

Jim McCabe started visibly at this cool affirmation, and for an instant his naturally red face was almost pale. But he was quickly himself again, and with an incredulous smile he muttered:

"Pshaw! the cursed fool don't know what he's talking about."

Then he turned on his heel again, and this time he was off and walking briskly away before the Yankee could detain him. Jonathan Boggs looked after him for a moment with a curious expression on his face, and then turning aside, he boldly entered the house of Mr. Moreland, without so much as knocking at the door.

Jim McCabe had not proceeded far, after leaving his new acquaintance so abruptly, before he met another person who stopped him. This was a small boy, about fourteen years of age, who wore a jaunty cap, a green jacket, and corduroy knee-breeches, which revealed his nationality as plainly as did his face. He was a bright-looking little fellow, with intelligent blue eyes and rosy cheeks, and, in fact, was no less a

personage than Mike Terry, the former servant of Doctor Trafford. He it was who had furnished the evidence that convicted his master's murderer.

"The top iv the mornin' to yeez, Jamie," said the young Hibernian, as he met McCabe.

"Well, what do you want?" gruffly demanded the man, as the boy seized his arm to prevent him from passing on.

"An' is it that same quistion ye'd be askin', sure? Phat w'u'd I be afther wantin' but money?"

"I haven't any money," declared McCabe, angrily.

"I know yeez have," asserted the boy, firmly, "an', be gorra, ef yeez don't give it to me, sorry the day yer Honor iver ttempted me to desart me colors, intirely. Av I wasn't yer cousin, Jamie, I should niver have done that wicked thing, no more w'u'd I. An' av it was all to do over, it isn't the likes iv Mike Terry that 'u'd play false to a kind masther for love or money. For Doctor Trafford and Masther Russell were good to me, Jamie, an' but for you—"

"Hush, Mike," continued the man, glancing uneasily around. "Have you gone crazy, or do you wish to expose me?"

"I ain't carin' much phat I do. Av yeez don't kape me in money I won't hold yer saycret a day longer; divil a bit will I. Ye've ined a bad b'y iv me, Jamie, an' ye're me own cousin, too."

"Here, take this, boy," said the angry man, handing him a coin, "and for Heaven's sake let it seal your lips. I can't afford to give you money every day. Now, go."

So Jim McCabe and Mike Terry parted, both of them looking very much discontented as they walked away in opposite directions.

When they were well gone, a man rose from behind a pile of logs within a few feet of the spot where they had stood conversing. It was the man of the bandaged eye and red, straggling beard, of whom we made mention in the foregoing chapter, and as he strode away, dragging his gun after him, his face was still expressionless.

The eavesdropper was Nick Robbins.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE AFTER DEATH.

As we have already stated, the grave of Doctor Trafford's supposed murderer was in a pretty little glade just outside of the settlement. Those who had known and liked the young man were only too glad to perform any office of respect to his corpse, and the grave had been dug so deep that there was no possibility of the body being reached by wild animals.

To this lonely spot the intimate friends of Russell Trafford would repair at times to lament, in solitude, the loss of one so good, noble, yet unfortunate.

That night, after his interview with Isabel Moreland, and the provoking stranger, Jonathan Boggs, Jim McCabe was seized with a strong inclination to pay a visit to the tomb of his ill-fated rival in love. Of course this inclination was not born of any such feeling as grief or re-

gret for the lost one, but, rather, of a desire to exult over his fallen foe, and glut his greedy eyes on the last resting-place of the man who would never more stand in his way.

He went. He told the man at the gate, as he passed out, that he would return in a few minutes, and then he walked slowly away into the shadows of the forest. He was musing on the events of the day as he wandered on; of the freezing coldness with which Isabel Moreland had met him; of the eccentric character, Jonathan Boggs, from Maine; and not a little of his cousin, the Irish boy, who had demanded money of him.

Thus meditating, Jim McCabe arrived at his destination. Emerging from the darkness of the woods, he paused on the edge of the glade to contemplate the scene before him.

Yes, there was the grave of the man he hated, in the very center of the open place—the small, grassy mound he had come to gloat over. He saw it now, and was satisfied; but why did the villain start back and stare, as his gleaming eyes alighted on the object he had come here to see? Well he might, for he saw at a glance that he was not the only person in that lonely spot. A man was there—a tall, finely-formed man, standing by the grave, with his head bowed upon his breast. He was motionless as a statue of stone. Who was this man—this mourner—this night visitor at the tomb of Russell Trafford?

Jim McCabe asked himself this question over and over, gazing keenly at the stately figure before him for an answer. Had he not seen that tall, graceful form before? He thought at first that he had, but was compelled to admit that this one was a stranger to him. Just as he arrived at this conclusion the unknown moved. He turned half around, which gave the silent watcher a full view of his face. The moonlight fell on his bare head, revealing a noble forehead, a pair of brilliant eyes, and features of the handsomest mold.

Good Heaven! *the man was Russell Trafford himself!*

Jim McCabe staggered backward, and grasped a tree for support. His face changed to a deathly pallor, the perspiration poured from his brow, and for a moment his breath came in spasmodic gasps. Russell Trafford! he who had been hung—he who was dead and buried—now standing before him in all his living health and manly beauty! Great God! could he believe his eyes? Had not he himself seen the man hung?

While the terrified ruffian was staring at the apparition, still another figure appeared in the glade. This, more to his surprise, he observed was not a male, but a *female* figure. It wore a white dress, and it was gliding toward the grave in the center of the natural clearing. Another keen glance, and McCabe had recognized this new appearance. It was Isabel Moreland!

Dumb with amazement, the lurker could do nothing but stand and stare. He saw the woman go up to the man; he saw the man catch her in his arms, and press his lips to her fair brow; and then he heard the low hum of their voices as they began an earnest but guarded conversation. In an instant his astonishment and consternation were transformed into fierce, ungov-

ernable rage. His blood boiled in his veins, and his hot head swam with the demoniac fury that took possession of him.

"A thousand curses!" he roared, in a voice hoarse with passion, as he snatched a pistol from his breast. "I swear I'll kill the scoundrel if he has a hundred lives!"

Like a wild beast bursting from its covert, Jim McCabe sprung from the shadow of the tree, pistol in hand, and bounded across the open space toward the lovers. But he had taken scarcely half a dozen strides, when a rough hand grasped his collar from behind, and he was jerked backward with a violence that well-nigh precipitated him to the ground. In the moonlight he saw the faces of three men, all scowling upon him as though he were the worst person in existence! He knew them all at a glance. One of them, he who had seized him by the collar, was Kirby Kidd, the stalwart ranger who had acted the part of hangman in the execution of young Trafford. Another was the friendly Wyandott Indian, Wapawab, the constant companion of the white hunter. The third and last member of the group was Nick Robbins, the man of the bandaged eye and expressionless face.

"What do you want of me?" demanded McCabe; "and what do you mean by jerking a fellow about in that manner?"

"See hyur, youngster," drawled Kirby Kidd, peering into the face of his captive, "who in creation are you, anyhow?"

"None of your business," was the curt reply.

"Yas, I thort so," continued the ranger, coolly. "But, never mind; I know who you be, now. Ye're Jim McCabe, the chap as are known to be the black sheep of the fort, an' the sneak-in'est hang-dog that ever set fire to a shanty! What in all natur' are ye—an eediot or a sleep-walker? 'cause it's plain to this coon 'ut ye're one or t'other. What wur ye caperin' round hyur fur? Hav' yer treed sunkthin'!"

"Can't you see what it is?" exclaimed McCabe, wildly. "Where are your eyes? Don't you see Russell Trafford and Isabel Moreland standing there, locked in a close embrace?"

"What! When? Where?" ejaculated Kirby Kidd and Nick Robbins, in a breath.

"Why, *there!*" roared the ruffian, in the wildest excitement, pointing toward the grave as he spoke.

"This coon sees nothin'," asserted Kidd.

"Neither do this 'un," echoed Robbins.

Nor did Jim McCabe himself see the apparitions now. During the brief space of time that his eyes were averted from the spot, the two figures had disappeared! Had he, after all, been laboring under a freak of imagination? He stared blankly at the three men, and the three men stared blankly at him.

"Poor cuss!" said the ranger; "he's gone crazy, to a sartainty."

"I haven't—I deny it," panted the terrified wretch. "By the Great Jehovah, I saw them as plainly as I now see you!"

"Yer see'd who?"

"Why, Miss Moreland and that young scamp of a Trafford."

"Poor cuss!" repeated the ranger, slowly. He is crazy, mold me into buckshot ef he ain't."

"I tell you I am not," cried the villain, with an oath.

"Look hyur, kumrid," argued Nick Robbins, "the man ye speak of are dead, and thar's his grave, right behind ye."

"I know all that, and yet I have not taken leave of my senses. If I did not see the real Russell Trafford, I saw his ghost, although I was never thought to believe in such things. He was standing yonder by the grave, and he was joined there by a female, whom I at once recognized as the daughter of Mr. Moreland."

"I reckon 'twur a couple o' spooks," said Kidd, solemnly. "Whar wur ye goin' when we saw fit to detain yer?"

"I was approaching the 'spooks,' as you call them."

"Approachin' 'em? Yas, I guess ye wur, but ye may mold me into buckshot ef I don't think ye're a sleep-walker. Ye started off as if yer futur' redemption depended upon yer speed, an' I must say 'ut ye seemed jest the least little bit angry, or frightened, or excited, or sunkthin' else, 'cause why? yer face was redder'n I ever see'd it, an' ye cussed like a trooper, an' yer eyes shined like hot fat. What ye got that pistol in yer hand fur?"

The ranger looked straight in the eye of McCabe as he made this last inquiry. McCabe started nervously, and quickly thrust the pistol into his pocket.

"I hardly know why I drew the weapon," he answered, turning very red, "but surely with no intention of using it. But, my friends, how came you here at this hour of the night?" he added, not caring particularly to continue the subject.

"How kum us hyur? Wal, ye see, Nick, thar, is a great coon-hunter, an' me an' the red-skin volunteered to 'kump'ny him to-night on one of his nocturnal tramps. But that reminds me, kumrids, that it's time we wur movin' on."

"And I must return home," said McCabe. "So good-night."

They parted, and while the three hunters went their way, Jim McCabe walked slowly homeward.

"Strange," he whispered to himself, as he hastened home; "'tis very strange indeed, but I know that I was not walking in my sleep. I believe that I am haunted. It never occurred to me before to-night that I am a double murderer!"

CHAPTER IV.

POOR ISABEL!

To say that Jim McCabe soon forgot his midnight adventure would not be speaking truthfully, for he did not. It preyed upon his mind so continuously that his once red face began to grow pale and haggard, and his eyes hollow. He could not, nor did he attempt to, explain the mysterious actions of Isabel, and her meeting with the supposed ghost, but he thought of it a great deal, and embracing the first opportunity that offered, even told the girl's father about it.

It is not likely that Mr. Moreland would have put any faith in the testimony of so unreliable a person as Jim McCabe, had he not heard the same story from other sources. Different par-

ties, happening by the glade on different nights, had come to him with the information that they had been very much surprised by seeing his daughter meet a man there in a very loverlike manner. None of them was prepared to say who the man was, since they had not been able to see his face, but that of Isabel seemed to have been plainly visible on each and every occasion.

The whole settlement was soon talking about the mysterious stranger, wondering who in the world he was, whence he came, and where he kept himself during the day. And the men looked puzzled, and the women held up their hands with horrified looks, as they speculated on the immodest conduct of Miss Moreland, but not a word of the gossip reached the ear of the wronged girl herself. All knew that the death of Russell Trafford had wrought a marked change in her appearance, but already the roses were returning to her cheeks, the luster to her eyes, and she was fast becoming the same light-hearted, joyous girl that had once been the light and life of the whole settlement. Was not this, in itself, proof that she had forgotten her old love?

Poor Isabel! She knew nothing of the calumnious gossip that was being indulged in at her expense. She little dreamed even that her friends had begun to regard her with feelings of distrust, much less her own kind parents, who had always had confidence in her self-esteem, womanly modesty, and true dignity of soul. But, when Sunday came round, and she went with her parents to the little log meeting-house, where the settlers were wont to repair for worship on this day of each week, she was surprised and pained by the strange looks and cold salutations she there received.

Thus matters went on with the Morelands. Almost every evening Isabel was observed to throw a light shawl over her shoulders and leave the house, and, on inquiry of the guards at the gate, it was ascertained that she really did leave the fort entirely in her nocturnal strolls. Still, neither the father nor mother was willing to broach the subject to the misguided daughter. They tried to think her innocent of any impropriety—to believe that she went out in the silent hours of night to weep unseen over the grave of her dead lover.

Once Mr. Moreland thought of forbidding the guard to let her out through the gate, but, before he had decided as to the feasibility of this plan, another one came to his mind which he liked much better. The forming of this last plan was followed by a firm resolution, and Mr. Moreland was not the man to break a resolution when once it was made.

"My dear," he said, when he and his wife were alone in the house, "I am no longer at a loss what course to take to prevent a continuance of this imprudent conduct on the part of our child. I have thought of several plans which I did not think proper, on careful consideration, to put into execution, but I have devised one now which I shall certainly act upon. About fifteen miles down the river there is a fort, as you doubtless remember, and to this fort I propose to remove. Some fine morning we will pack our worldly effects, and take our poor daughter to a new home. She shall know

nothing of the project until the time of starting, and then this strange lover of hers will not know what has become of her."

Mrs. Moreland listened calmly to this. The idea of breaking off old associations, and turning their backs on their present home, was by no means a pleasant one to her. But she thought of all that was in the scales, and did not demur. So it was decided to take Isabel far away from the unknown scoundrel who had lured her from the path of duty, but they studiously avoided uttering a word of their intentions in her presence.

Among the foremost of the girl's vilifiers was Jim McCabe, who told all of his acquaintances how he had seen her meet a strange-looking man at an unseemly hour, in an unseemly place, and how she had permitted him to embrace and kiss her. As may well be supposed, the scheming rascal had an object in this. His hope was to deprive her entirely of her good name, and then go to her with words of deep compassion and urge her to fly with him away from those bad people!

One day, while McCabe was strolling through the settlement, he encountered the Irish boy, Mike Terry. Somewhat to his surprise, Mike had seemed to purposely shun him of late, and on this occasion he determined to have an interview. So he took a gold piece from his pocket, and accosted the lad.

"Mike, here is some money for you," he said, with a bland smile. "I have not given you any for some time, and I must say that your long silence has pleased me very much."

"Divil a cint iv yer money do I want," replied the boy, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Why, what has come over you?" asked McCabe, in surprise.

"A faylin' iv remorse for phat I've been an' done," answered Mike, moodily, beginning to dig his heel into the ground. "It's yer own cousin I am, Jamie, on me mother's side iv the house, but, begorra, ye've made me hate yeez like a kitten hates a wet floor."

"Why so, Mike? What the deuce are you whining about?"

"Faith! don't I have enough throuble to make me whine? Didn't yeez do an awful wicked thing, sure, and didn't yeez make a tool iv me to work yersilf out iv the scrape wid yer life? That ye did, ye bla'guard, an' av it wasn't yer own cousin I am, I should niver have done it, at all, at all. Bad 'cess to yees for takin' advantage iv me youth an' our relationship to wheedle me into this wickedness. I've a great mind to confess all, an' let 'em sthring ye up be the neck iv yeez; it's desarvin' it, ye are."

Jim McCabe began to exhibit signs of alarm.

"See here, you little fool," he hissed, grasping the boy's arm, "you must exercise better judgment than this, or things will be brought to a pretty pass. The man is dead; both are dead, and it is too late now to remedy the matter. All you have to do is to keep your mouth, and all will be well; but let contrition bring you to a confession of your guilt, and, just so surely as you stand before me now, you will hang!"

"Not I, Jamie."

"Yes, you as well as I. Was it not your evidence that convicted him? Would they not re-

gard you as a murderer, and punish you accordingly? As a matter of course they would, and the best thing you can do is to keep your tongue in your head. Do you hear?"

Mike Terry heard, and it was evident, too, that he believed his crafty cousin, for he relapsed into silence and continued digging in the ground with his heel. At length, however, he looked up suddenly, with a strange glitter in his eyes.

"Jamie," he whispered, huskily, "do yeez belave in spooks?"

McCabe started in spite of himself at this unexpected inquiry.

"Spooks, boy? What do you mean?"

"Why, ghosts, to be sure! Raal, ginewine ghosts."

"Ha, ha! Of course I do not. But why do you ask?"

It was plain that the laugh was forced, and that the villain was not a little disconcerted by the question put to him. He was thinking of a night not long gone, which would ever be fresh in his memory, should he live a hundred years.

"The raison why I ax," said Mike, "is this: I saw one!"

"What! saw a ghost? Nonsense!"

"Yis, sur; a ginewine *sperit*. Ye know there's a big sinsation 'bout that Moreland gurriel. They say she mates a sthranger ivery night out there where Masther Russell's grave is. Well, me curiosity got the upper hand iv me, Jamie, an' I thought I'd thry an' git a glimpse iv the sthranger that iverybody was talkin' about. So, last avenin', I went out there in the woods all alone. I hid mesilf in the bushes, an' while I was layin' there, phat d' yeez think come along? *The ghost iv Russell Trafford!*"

Jim McCabe closed his white lips tightly over his teeth with a mighty effort to control himself. This conclusion of Mike Terry's recital was just what he had expected, but it was none the less startling for that fact.

"You positively saw this?" he said to Mike.

"Yis," said Mike, "an' I was dridfully scairt."

"Was the 'ghost,' as you call it, alone?"

"Entirely alone; an' I was scairt half out iv me wits."

"Did nobody join him there?"

"Faith, I didn't wait to see! I took to me heels like a strake iv gr'ased lightnin'. Musha! musha! I niver was so scairt before."

McCabe mused awhile, and then asked:

"You don't believe in ghosts, Mike?"

"Och, but I do, though!" asserted the Irish boy. "Me father used to belave in 'em, ye know, an' he used to till long sthories about 'em that 'u'd raise the hair iv me to hear."

"Pshaw! Your father was a drunken sot."

"Yis; he resimbled, in that respect, yer own dear silf," said Mike, with a flash of his old jocoseness. "But, Jamie," he added, seriously, "av I had niver belaved in sperits before, I couldn't help doin' it now, afther phat I've been an' seen."

"Come with me, cousin," said McCabe, in a changed tone of voice. "Let us go to my house and talk this thing over."

He linked his arm in that of the lad, and the two walked slowly on together.

No sooner were they gone from the spot where they had been conversing, than a man stepped out from behind a tree, and stalked away as calmly as if nothing had been said in his hearing.

Again it was Nick Robbins!

CHAPTER V. CLOUDED HEARTS.

THE day soon came that was to witness the departure of the Morelands, and there was much ado in preparing for the down-river journey. They were not to start until night-fall, having been repeatedly advised to travel wholly by night, and lie in concealment during the day, as the woods at that time were swarming with hostile Indians.

And even under cover of darkness they were not permitted to go alone. The commandant at the block-house selected a dozen good men to accompany them down the river as an escort.

Isabel was not apprised of the project in view, until the afternoon preceding the evening of their departure. When informed that they were going to take up their abode at another fort, miles away, she took no pains to conceal her astonishment, but prudently refrained from asking questions. It was plain that she suspected the true cause of this strange decision on the part of her father, but the troubled look she wore, as she saw herself an object of distrust in the eyes of her parents, was interpreted by them as deep regret at being compelled to leave her new lover.

Isabel was standing in the door, looking very beautiful and very sad, when Jim McCabe, who always seemed lying in wait for this sort of an opportunity to gain an interview, stepped up to her, and doffed his hat with an attempt at politeness. She would have retreated had she seen him approaching, but he had spoken to her before she knew he was nigh.

"Miss Moreland," he said, leaning against the house, and looking up at her with a bland smile, "I hear you are about to leave us?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, briefly.

"I—I—am really sorry, Miss Moreland," he continued, feigning embarrassment, "that we are doomed to be deprived of the brightest star that lights the little world within these palisades. I presume, though, that you have friends here with whom you are equally as sorry to part. Am I not right?"

"It is never a pleasure to part with one's friends."

"Very true; and you will leave a great many friends behind you," said McCabe, feeling his way cautiously.

"I trust you are right," replied Isabel, coldly. "It is not pleasant to reflect that our pathway of life is surrounded by enemies alone."

"And yet such may be the case," hinted the man.

Observing nothing serious behind these words, Isabel was silent.

"Miss Moreland," he resumed, "I suppose you know nothing of the slanderous reports that have been circulated at your expense?"

"I do not understand,"

"Then listen. We were speaking of friends; it is my opinion that you have comparatively few at present."

"Explain yourself."

"I will. But, first—begging your pardon—let me be so presumptuous as to ask you a question. Have you recently been meeting a man, at a certain hour of the night, out yonder by the grave of Russell Trafford?"

He looked keenly at her, but was disappointed in what he saw. Her face expressed nothing but astonishment and offended pride.

"Sir, you are impertinent," she exclaimed.

"I ask a simple question."

"I say you speak in riddles."

"Then I will be more explicit. For a week your supposed unwomanly conduct has been the talk of the whole village. They say that you have been led astray by an entire stranger, who has won your affections, and whom you have been meeting at an unbecoming hour and place. I need hardly tell you that I have met this wicked rumor with the contempt it deserves, but, I am sorry to say, that in which I have no faith is believed by every one else."

Isabel Moreland bit her lip hard to stop its quivering, and the rich color came and went beneath the transparent surface of her cheeks. It was all plain to her now. At last she had explanation of the great change that had taken place in her former friends, and she knew why they treated her so coldly. She was silent for some time, and then, flashing her big, black eyes upon McCabe, she gave him a look that seemed to burn into his very soul.

"I know who started that report," she said.

"What—you know who—well?"

"You did it, sir!"

"Eh?"

"I say, sir, that *you* were the originator of the malicious report of which you take delight in telling me."

"I beg your pardon, nadam, if I see fit to dispute your word, but I must say, in defense of myself, that you are speaking under a sad mistake. Why do you think me guilty of this wicked thing? Ah, I know. You are thinking of the night when I saw you in the glade, clasped in the embrace of that stranger."

The girl dropped her eyes in confusion. Her heart heaved tumultuously with conflicting emotions, and a sinister smile curled McCabe's thin lips as he observed it.

"Still," continued the brute, "you wrong me in attributing the origin of that report to me. I was not certain that the woman I saw that evening was you, though it is true I noted the resemblance. On my word of honor, Miss Moreland, I have not opened my mouth until this moment concerning that of which I chanced to be a witness. There are several others who have seen the same thing that I saw, and have been gossiping about it at a fearful rate."

Having relieved himself of this speech, McCabe fancied that he had said the right thing in the right place, and looked vastly important as he awaited an answer. Isabel composed herself with difficulty, but when she spoke again it was quite calmly.

"Does my father know of this?" she asked.

"He does. Both your father and mother

have been repeatedly told of it, if I am rightly informed."

The girl was silent again.

"Miss Moreland," pursued the profligate, taking a step nearer, "I have told you how firmly I have espoused your cause, and proved myself your devoted friend through all. I am certain that you have the best of reasons for meeting this so-called stranger—a reason which, although it is sufficient to excuse you from censure, you are not yet at liberty to divulge. Darling, I am the only one who has faith in your innocence. I know you are too good, too pure—"

"Cease your mockery, villain!" cried Isabel, her whole manner changing in an instant. "Leave me at once, and see that you never open your foul mouth to address me again! I have been blind heretofore, but I now see your object in lionizing yourself in my presence! Be off! I hate you! I loathe you!"

Jim McCabe was somewhat taken aback by this outburst. Passion getting the best of him, his face became livid; he clinched his hands involuntarily, and gnashed his teeth like a mad-dened brute.

"Go, execrable wretch!" commanded Isabel. "I see my father coming; take yourself off immediately, or I shall ask him to assist you."

"Your father, indeed," laughed McCabe, in a sort of ecstasy of rage. "Little does he now care for his deceitful, perfidious daughter. He won't think it possible for anybody to insult her after all that has been revealed to him. Listen, Isabel Moreland—I leave you now at your command, but, mark my word, two days shall not pass away before we meet again, and you will be in my power!"

The next moment he was gone.

Isabel entered the house and at once sought her little chamber, there to be alone with her thoughts and tears. She understood now why she was about to be taken away from her present home, and it grieved her to think her parents had lost confidence in her.

When night came she went with her parents to the river which flowed by within three hundred yards of the settlement. On reaching the bank they found the escort waiting—stalwart, sturdy-looking rangers, all armed to the teeth. There were two large boats lying close up under the river-bank, one of them being occupied by eight of the men, and the other by the remaining four, which latter was also to carry the family.

Mr. and Mrs. Moreland at once took their places in the boat, but Isabel hesitated.

"Come, child," said her mother, "step in and sit down here by me. I suspect the men are impatient to be off."

The men were taking up their oars, preparatory to starting.

"Mamma," said Isabel, "I have forgotten something."

"Forgotten something?"

"Yes."

"What is it? Nothing of importance, I hope, for we cannot tarry until you return for it."

"But it is of importance, mamma. It is that pretty case of trinkets that father gave me, and among its contents is that golden locket which I

prize so highly, containing the pictures of yourself and papa. I placed it on the mantle-piece in the front room, just before starting, intending to get it as I came out. I must go back now, for I cannot lose it."

"There is no necessity for either the one or the other," put in her father, a little sharply. "We cannot wait here until you obtain it, so get in here with your mother and let us be gone."

"I will not be absent long," persisted the maiden.

"Too long to keep us waiting. Please take your place in the boat, and say no more about it. Your case of trinkets will not be lost, depend upon it. We can speak to old Kirby Kidd, and have him bring it to you, as you know he frequently makes a trip between the two forts. The men have been waiting here long enough already to try their patience, and I'm sure they don't relish the idea of a longer delay."

"Yer father's right, miss," said one of the rangers, respectfully. "I don't want to oppose ye, but hyur's as calculates yer father's right; 'cause why? we got to go a consid'able ways afore mornin'."

"Not so very fur," said another. "We've only to make two-thirds o' the distance to-night, an' that ain't more'n ten mile, ye know. We've got to stop at that island, Jack, that Kidd was tellin' us about, and lay thar till to morrow night 'fore completin' the journey. The gal's got plenty o' time to git her valu'bles."

"There, father, what do you say to that?" cried Isabel.

"I say, my child, that I myself will go back after your treasure," said Mr. Moreland, preparing to step out of the boat.

"No, papa; no, no, no!" contested the daughter, earnestly. "I will go myself. I can go more quickly, you know."

And, before he could expostulate, she had turned and tripped lightly up the bank, and in another moment had disappeared in the darkness.

As Isabel hurried through the woods toward the settlement, she murmured to herself:

"Poor papa and mamma! It goes to my heart to look upon them in their deep sorrow, conscious that I could relieve them of their trouble by a word. It is hard to deceive them, who love me so dearly, but I am sure they will forgive me when they know all. My case of trinkets I left for an excuse to return. God forgive me! I believe it is all for the best. I must hurry and get the case, and then keep my appointment with him."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

JIM MCCABE had formed a villainous plot when he heard that the Morelands were about to remove down the river, and, now that they were gone, he proceeded at once to put it into execution. He had had this plot in his mind when he told Isabel that she would be in his power before the lapse of two days, and he vowed again and again to himself that his scheme should be carried out to the letter.

That night, as soon as the Moreland family

had set out for the river, McCabe went to his cabin, armed himself with a gun, pistol and knife, secured about his person an ample supply of ammunition, and otherwise equipped himself in a manner indicating a dangerous journey in view.

This done, which took considerable time, he left the fort without delay. As he passed out he stopped at the gate long enough to inform the sentry that he need not be expected back that night, as he would be gone two days or more.

"I wonder if I'll succeed?" mused McCabe, as he hastened on through the darkness. If I can find Simon Girty before the game has reached a place of refuge, success is certain; but the question is, will I find him? Without his services I can see how the thing will result; but if he is not to be found, I shall undertake the task alone at all hazards, rather than throw up my hand without an attempt to win. Christopher! wouldn't there be a big furor at the fort should my intimacy with that notorious renegade, Girty, be discovered? My life wouldn't be worth shucks. By the way—"

Jim McCabe stopped suddenly, and stood stock-still. An idea struck him. He trembled to think of such a thing, yet he was seized with a desire to look once more on the grave of Russell Trafford before going away!

He acted upon the irresistible impulse, and that without any unnecessary loss of time, for he had evidently begun a journey that would not admit of procrastination. Turning aside from the course he had been pursuing, he bent his footsteps toward the glade. He looked to the priming of his gun, and began to exercise caution as he proceeded, for fear that somebody was indeed there, who would be apprised of his approach unless he stepped with care.

"Of course nobody is there," he said to himself, "but it is best to be careful. I wish I could forget that I ever saw anything frightful in that haunted place; but even rum has lost its power to drown the memory of that awful night. I can no longer doubt that it was a spirit I saw, for Kirby Kidd, and Wapawah, and Nick Robbins were there, and they saw nothing."

While thus communing with himself, McCabe was moving slowly along and cautiously, scarcely misplacing a twig, or rustling a leaf, in his progress. But, no sooner had he finished his monologue than he suddenly came to a dead halt, and bent forward in a listening attitude.

No wonder, for he distinctly heard the low hum of voices, rising and falling in calm, smooth tones, as if engaged in a friendly and familiar conversation. The sound came from some point directly in front of him—evidently from the glade.

Dropping down on his hands and knees, he advanced stealthily toward the glade, as the panther approaches its prey. The voices grew more distinct as he drew nearer to the speakers, and once or twice he paused to listen as he fancied he detected the dulcet tones of a female voice. But he could not be certain.

When he had gone so far that he could go no further without exposing himself to the parties from whom he was hiding, he stopped and rose slowly to his feet behind a large tree, and peer-

ing around the tree slyly, he looked out into the opening.

"There, sure enough, were two human forms sitting side by side on the grave! One of them was that of a woman, too, as he could plainly see, and the other was a fine-looking man, bare-headed and dressed in a suit of somber black. Her hands were in his, and they were looking into each other's eyes in a manner that could not be mistaken. They were conversing pleasantly, but in such low tones that few of the words were distinguishable. Jim McCabe leaned forward to give them a closer look. The next instant his knees struck together, his eyes started half-out of their sockets, and he scarcely suppressed the cry that sprang to his lips.

The man and woman sitting on the grave were Russell Trafford and Isabel Moreland!

It would be difficult to describe the feelings that harrowed the villain's breast as he made this discovery, but fear, amazement, and indomitable rage were predominant. This time the appearance of the girl there was more wonderful than that of the man, to him, for he deemed it not nearly so strange for a spirit to walk the earth, as he did for a human being to be present at two places at the same time; and he had certainly seen Isabel go away with her parents that evening.

When his fear had subsided his blood began to boil with furious anger, as on the first occasion. He not only found it impossible to control himself, but he scarcely knew what he did.

"By the Eternal!" he shrieked, "'tis the second time I have been fated to look on this scene, and if that man is not a ghost he shall be one in less than a minute! Curse you, take that!"

McCabe threw up his rifle and leveled it at the couple on the grave.

There was a flash and a report, followed by a suppressed scream. Then Jim McCabe leaped out from behind the tree, clubbed his gun and bounded out into the open glade. He dashed through the cloud of smoke that had been caused by the discharge of his piece, and in another moment was standing beside the grave!

Nobody was there! The baffled wretch glared about him like a madman. Not a living thing was within range of his gleaming eyes! Not the slightest sound of a footstep told him that they had fled from him. He walked round the edge of the wood, looking behind trees, and thrusting the barrel of his gun into the bushes, but discovered no trace of those for whom he was searching. Then he stopped and pressed his hand to his brow, with an effort to calm his excited brain.

"I must be doomed," he thought. "I have heard of people seeing such visions, but they always die shortly afterward."

"Hallo, stranger! How dew you dew?" called out a sharp, nasal voice at that juncture.

McCabe whirled round and placed himself on the defensive in a twinkling. But he instantly lowered his weapon with a show of recognition, as he found himself face to face with a singular-looking specimen of the *genus homo*, who wore a blue swallow-tail coat, and a tall white hat with the nap brushed the wrong way. It was the Yankee clock-peddler, who had been hang-

ing about the settlement for the last week or two, and who, it will be remembered, had previously introduced himself to McCabe, much to that gentleman's vexation.

"You here?" he exclaimed, staring in wonder at the intruder, as the latter grasped his hand in an iron gripe, and began to talk to him familiarly.

"Wal, yas," answered the Yankee, with a huge grin; "I calkilate this is *me*, and ef it is *me*, I'm *here*. As Tabitha Simpson used tew say—"

"How came you here?" demanded McCabe, uneasily.

"Now I consider that a leetle tew steep, mister," declared the clock-peddler, gravely. "I'm Jonathan Boggs, all the way from Maine, and I'm 'customed tew dewin' jest as I darn please when I'm tew hum, and I-guess I mought venture tew foller up the rule out in these diggin's. How came me here, did you ask? I swan tew man—"

"Stop!" cried McCabe. "Tell me, how long have you been here?"

"'Bout five feet ten, 'cordin' tew last measure; but maybe I am longer 'n that now, seein' I've growed some since I left Maine."

"No, no!" said the other, impatiently; "you misunderstood me. What length of time have you been here?"

"Been where?"

"Why, here, in the vicinity—this spot?"

"Wal," drawled the Yankee, scratching his head, "I s'pect I been in this vicinity several minutes, ef not longer."

"Have you seen anything while you were here?"

"See'd anything? Wal, not a great deal. It's rayther tew darkish-like tew see anything, ain't it, mister?"

"I—I don't know. Did you *hear* anything, then?"

Jonathan Boggs took a step backward, hung his tall hat on the back part of his head, thrust his hands into his pockets, and gave the inquisitive man a most searching look.

"See here!" he exclaimed; "what dew you take me for?"

"Eh?"

"Are you pokin' fun at me, or not?"

"Most assuredly not."

"Then what's the matter—say? You ax more foolish questions than a child 'u'd think of, and I won't stand it. I'm Jonathan Boggs, of Maine, I am, and I'm a full-fledged game-chicken with an eye to bizness. I'm a hull team, with an extra hoss for up-hill emergencies, and ef you think you can outpull me, hitch on behind and stretch yourself. I'm a reg'lar screecher, and can whip—"

How long the clock-peddler would have continued to enumerate his wonderful qualifications must forever remain unknown, as Jim McCabe soon saw proper to interrupt him.

"For Heaven's sake desist!" he pleaded. "You are offended because I asked you a question. I have an object, I assure you."

The "down-East" specimen seemed to relent at this.

"Maybe I'm in the wrong," he said, after a pause. "I believe you axed me ef I'd heern anything?"

"Yes."

"Now that is a queer question, and no mistake. Heern anything! Drat it, man, d' you s'pose I'm deaf? How could I help hearin' you when you screeched out like a red Injun, and shot a salute over the last restin'-place o' the poor cuss as sleeps beneath this sod?"

"Did you hear that?"

"Did I? Why, chaw me up, I thought at first you was bangin' away at me, and I flew tew kiver in the jerk of a 'possum's ear."

"Where were you?"

"Where was I? When you let that dod-rotted gun o' yourn go off I was settin' right thar on that grave—"

"What!"

Jim McCabe staggered back like a drunken man, with blanched face and staring eyes!

"Lord, mister, what's the matter?" asked the Yankee.

"Noth—nothing," stammered the ruffian, with a mighty effort to compose himself. "It's—it's nothing—at all. I—never mind—only a slight ner—nervous attack. I believe you said you were sitting on the grave when I discharged my piece?"

"That's jest what I said."

"And who was with you?"

"Me, and myself, and Jonathan Boggs. Nobody was with me."

"You were alone, then?"

"Yas."

"You *lie*!" almost screamed the profligate.

"Hey!" ejaculated the Yankee. "See here, mister, that 'ere's a *mighty* strong expression for a man o' your heft tew spout forth tew a State o' Maine wild-cat. I've a powerful itchin' tew swipe you one across the bill for that, you goll-darn, sneakin, ignominious fag-end o' creation, you! By the jumpin' Jemima! ef I didn't know you was subject to crazy spells, I'm blowed ef I wouldn't paint your cheeks for you. I lie, dew I? Oh, wade intew me, and let me knock you intew a grease-spot. Lucky for you, mister, that you ain't smart, for ef you was I'd do like Tabitha Simpson used tew say her brother done—"

But Jim McCabe waited to hear no more. Suddenly remembering that he was wasting precious moments, and beginning to entertain a perfect horror of that spot, he determined to be off without further loss of time. Shouldering his gun, he strode past Boggs without a word, and walked rapidly away.

"Hold on!" shouted Jonathan. "Where you gwine tew?"

He received no reply, for McCabe, with rapid strides, was soon lost to view.

CHAPTER VII.

BOGGS ADRIFT.

"I WONDER what detains Isabel!" said Mrs. Moreland, for the twentieth time, perhaps, as she and the rest of the party sat in the boats, awaiting the maiden's return.

"I cannot guess," said her husband, uneasily, at the same time listening intently, with the hope of catching the sound of that familiar footstep in the woods above. "She has been gone long enough, almost, to have gone there and

back three or four times, and she gave us to understand before starting that she would not be absent a greater while than it would require to run home, procure her case of trinkets, and return."

"Perhaps," continued the fond mother, willing to believe anything that would excuse the absent one, "perhaps she has met a friend, who has so much to say at parting that she finds it difficult to tear herself away."

Mr. Moreland shook his head.

"Not that, I'll warrant. Isabel isn't the girl to tarry for so slight a cause, when she has promised to go and come so quickly. Besides, since her recent misdemeanor, I can think of no one, alas! who regards her as a friend. I think I will go in search of her; we are losing time in waiting."

"I wouldn't do any sech thing, Mr. Moreland," said one of the rangers. "'Tain't likely 'ut harm has befallen the gal 'twixt this an' the fort, an' ye knows nothin' has happened to her thar. Jest keep yer seat; she'll be hyur in a minute, I take it."

"But you forget the loss of time."

"I forgit nothin'. What's a few minutes spent in idleness at sech a time as this? How long are it goin' to take us to travel ten mile with the current? We mought make't long 'fore mornin'."

"True; I did not think of that. But, since that is the case, why would it not be possible to make the entire distance without stopping, provided we left here early in the evening?"

"We mought do it easy, 'cause I don't reckon it's more'n fifteen or sixteen mile, and the course lays down-stream. But ye must b'ar in mind, prudence has the preference over everything. Never make haste ag'in' prudence, whatever ye does. Us fellers wa'n't sent with yer to row yer boats an' shuffle ye off down't t'other fort in a jiffy. We're with ye to protect ye from danger if needcessary, an' eff we go rattlin' off as fast as we kin lug the oars, I opine it'll soon be needcessary. The moon are settin' now, an' in five minutes it'll be darker'n a stack o' black cats. It's goin' to take a cute noddle, I s'pect, to keep the boats in the middle o' the river, an' precious little rowin' will be did, 'cept to guide 'em, 'cause we must have complete silence the whole way through. We'll pass more'n one Injun camp-fire, I make no doubt, an' who knows but we may run into a nest o' the skunks on the very island whar we are to stop?"

"Hist! Listen!" exclaimed Mrs. Moreland, at this point in the conversation. "I believe I heard our daughter's voice."

The two men paused and listened.

"Thar's somebody comin', to a sartainty," said the ranger, hearing the snapping of twigs occasioned by a footfall in the woods.

"Very true, and I presume— Hark!"

A peal of clear, rippling laughter fell upon their ears.

"Why, what does that mean?" said Mr. Moreland, in surprise. "That is our daughter, without a doubt, but she is not alone. Hear! she is talking with some person."

"Only a friend, I suppose, who has accompanied her to the river to see her off," returned his wife.

"Well, here they are. We can see who it is."

At that moment two persons appeared on the bank above them.

One of them was Isabel, truly, but the other was a *man*. He was rather a singular-looking man, too, as we have already observed several times in the course of our story; a man with lank, yellow hair, a tall white hat, and a sharp, nasal voice, who wore a long, swallow-tail blue, with brass buttons scattered promiscuously upon it! This was the individual who burst upon the view of the voyagers in the company of the young girl.

"Skulp me ef 'tain't that ar' clock-peddler, as sez he's from Maine," chuckled one of the men.

"It is, or I'm a skunk," chimed in another.

"Hallo, thar, Boggs," called a third. "What in the name of the Old Scratch are you doin' hyur?"

"Isabel," said Mr. Moreland, almost sternly, "get in the boat quickly, and let us be off. You have already detained us much longer than was necessary."

"Oh, papa, my delay was unavoidable," cried Isabel, as she stepped in. "But, look, papa, here is a gentleman who wishes to accompany us. Is there room for him?"

"A gentleman? Who is he?"

"Jonathan Boggs, all the way from Maine!" ejaculated that individual himself, coming down to the water's edge with a single stride. "Here I be, every bit o' me, an' a foot or two to spare. Want tew buy a clock?"

The Yankee drew himself up to his full hight, and coolly scanned the crew of each vessel.

"It strikes me I have seen you before," said Mr. Moreland, after surveying the New Englander from head to foot.

"Wal, then, you may view me *behind* awhile," returned the man, with the utmost nonchalance, quietly turning his back toward the voyagers as he spoke.

"No, no; you did not understand me correctly," said the settler, smiling. "Come; look here."

The clock-vender turned slowly around again, seemingly puzzled by the low, chuckling laugh which ran through the party of hunters.

"Your name is Boggs?" asked Mr. Moreland.

"Yas, all the way from Maine," was the quick reply.

"And you are going to the same fort we are bound for?"

"That 'ere's what I calkilate on dewin', ef I'm lucky 'nough tew obtain deck-passage on one o' these sloops. What d'ye think, governor? All the berths taken? You see I might be o' some use, as I'd be willin' tew take my turn at the paddles."

"Well, my friend, you can be of no assistance to us in that way, but you are at liberty to become one of us, if you wish. Get in."

"That's the talk."

The Yankee stepped into the boat, and took a seat in the bow. There being no cause for further delay, the word was now given to start, and the loaded boats were at once put in motion. Moving slowly out into the current of the river, the little vessels glided away on their downward course.

"I s'pose you'll do your share if it comes to

fighting?" said one of the men, addressing the Yankee.

"My sheer?" was the astonished reply. "Now, see here, stranger, you ain't afeard, be you? But, never mind. Ef it comes tew fightin', and you'd rayther keep out o' sight till it's over, I guess I can take your part in the tussle."

There was a low, guarded laugh at the interrogator's expense.

"But you are unarmed," continued the ranger, undaunted.

"Unarmed? Jumpin' Jemima! can't you see these arms? Jest look at that reach! I can pull a nigger's hair at ten yards!"

"Yes, but you have no weapons."

"Weepins? Law, no, but what the 'tarnal creation do a Maine wild-cat want o' weepins! Jerewsilem! When I was a suckin' cub in the manger I had pistols and knives for playthings, but I'm a man now, and have no further use for sech toys. Weepins! Ef an Injun should lose all respect for hisself, so far as tew come 'ithin ten yards o' this personage, I tell you, stranger, he'd be apt tew run ag'in' an iron weight as 'u'd send him tew grass in the shakin' o' a possum's ear. Oh, I'm a squealer! I'm a hard-shell snappin'-turkle from Sebago Pond! I'm an amphibious rep'ile, and I'm game tew the spine on land or water! I'm a six-hoss team with a mule tew lead, and ef you don't believe it git up and ride. Let the red-skins come at me, ef they think o' no better way tew die. I'll skelp 'em with a single look. I'll blister their confounded mugs with a single squint o' my eye. Me? Darnation! I'm a-dewin' business for old Mount Aetna, and there's fire, smoke and lava b'ilin' inside o' me—"

"Say," interrupted a man in the other boat; "jest cause that noisy chap to shet his meat-trap will yer?"

Jonathan Boggs needed no further bidding, and in silence the two boats drifted on through the increasing gloom.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO WELL-MATCHED VILLAINS.

To a spot about ten miles distant from the settlement we now ask the attention of the indulgent reader.

It is the morning following the night whose events we have just described; the sun has risen in a cloudless sky, and Nature seems exerting herself to make existence in this world desirable. It is a lovely morning, made refreshing by a steady breeze, and the trees ring with the lays of a thousand feathered warblers, singing glad welcome to the orb of day.

At a place where the wood is thickest a man is moving along with stealthy, catlike steps, dodging from tree to tree in a very curious manner. He is a man of medium proportions, wearing the buckskin garb of a hunter, and armed with the weapons usually carried by the early pioneers and wood-rangers. From beneath a coon-skin cap, lank locks of red hair fall just to his shoulders, and a coarse beard of the same hue disfigures, rather than adorns, his face. There is an ugly patch on his left cheek, and his right eye is completely hidden by a rough bandage that is tied around his head, all

giving him a decidedly unprepossessing, if not repulsive, look.

After this, it is perhaps superfluous to add that the hunter's name is Nick Robbins, the detective. As such he has doubtless been recognized, although it is observable that there is much more expression on his visage than usual. In fact, through the unhandsome exterior, beams a look of fine intelligence that might lead one to suppose the backwoodsman has received a thorough education at some time of his life.

Nick the Detective is approaching a deep ravine that lies a short distance away. He moves toward it step by step, with studied circumspection, his quick eye flashing from right to left occasionally, but the greater part of the time fastened upon the ravine in front. He creeps along with that caution usually exercised by hunters when stealing upon the game, or scouts when nearing an enemy's camp, and yet he is the only living person or living thing in sight. It is evident, however, from his manner and actions, that he is not only intent on reaching a certain point ahead, but is extremely fearful that his footsteps will betray him to somebody or something before he can reach it.

"Strange that he should go there," mutters Nick. "Bad as he is, I should never have supposed that he was leagued with the Indians. He entered that ravine as he would have entered his own house, and I know there is a bivouac of savages there. Very well, I shall soon know what it means, if I am not discovered, and who knows but at the same time I may obtain proofs of the fellow's guilt in that other affair. Of course I am already satisfied in my own mind that he is the guilty party, but despite the length of time that I have been a spy upon his movements, and an eavesdropper to his conversations, I have not as yet heard a direct affirmation that such is the truth. But something seems to tell me that the crisis is at hand, and that to-morrow's sun will reveal wonders to many of our friends. I must now find out what new scheme this villain has hatched."

Nick has, by this time, proceeded so far that a confused sound of voices strike upon his ear, coming from the ravine in front. He crouches down on all-fours, and crawls forward with redoubled caution. He sights a wide, smooth ledge of rock, or plateau, that extends out over the gully, and toward this he worms himself, taking great care that he moves no stone in his progress.

He reaches the level platform of rock. He draws himself up to the edge of it, and looks down. Finding that he has chosen the proper point for observation, he lies flat upon his breast and begins to contemplate the scene below him with no slight degree of interest.

A tiny stream ripples through the ravine. On one side of it is a large camp-fire, around which a band of Indians is congregated, sitting or reclining in various attitudes, some breakfasting and some smoking, while others are doing nothing. They number about thirty souls in all, and a single glance at them discovers more than one evidence of the fact that they are, or recently have been, on the war-path. This fact is shown by their scantiness of dress and abundance of paint, they being incumbered with no

other garments than leggings and moccasins, and their bodies and faces being plentifully bedaubed with red and yellow ocher.

The gaze of Nick does not long linger on this savage band. There are others there who claim his attention. At some distance from the main body of Indians, and directly under the rocky ledge on which he is lying, two men stand conversing.

Of these two men, one is no less a personage than the despicable profligate, Jim McCabe. The detective evinces little surprise, but much interest, as his eyes alight on this man, for he saw him enter the ravine, and now only seeks an explanation of the fellow's strange actions. McCabe's companion is obviously the chief, or leader, of the war-party. His title to this distinction is revealed by his bearing, and the superiority of his dress and adornments. To tell the color of his skin it would be necessary to remove the thick covering of paint from his face and body, but that he is *not* an Indian our spy begins to suspect after the first look. A closer survey convinces him of this fact. There are no high cheek-bones there; no sharp Roman nose; no stoical stoniness of features; nor even that style of standing characteristic of his savage followers. Besides this, he speaks the English language as fluently as Jim McCabe himself. In all probability he is a white man—one of those degraded, crime-hardened wretches, who forswear their own race forever, that they may plunder and murder to their hearts' content, beyond the restrictions of the law.

"You are not looking well, my boy," are the first words the hunter distinguishes after taking his position on the rock, and it is the white chief who gives utterance to them.

"Am I not?" carelessly answers McCabe, who really has grown pale and haggard since his adventure of last night. "I am not aware of any feeling that may account for the look."

"For all that, you don't look as healthy as when I saw you last. Maybe you've done something bad, that preys on your mind too much for your own good? Ha, ha! Or, likely, your friends have detected you in some of your devilments, and in consequence you have just escaped from confinement that is not extremely beneficial to your health? Which is it?"

"Neither the one nor the other. Nothing like that you hint at has occurred. I am still safe among those who think me their friend, and the secret of my friendship with you and your red lambs, I have securely locked in my own breast."

"And you will have occasion, sir, to thank your lucky stars that you are on the good side of me and my red lambs, if we take it into our heads to fall upon your place. But why don't you explain your presence here? Seems to me you've wandered quite a distance from your home."

"I should have wandered further, had I not met you," said McCabe. "But, before I give you the desired explanation, I wish you to tell me how it happens that *you* are here. I started out last night with the hope of finding you before night should come again, but my hope grew less at every step, and by dawn it had amounted almost to despair. I know where

your village is, but sober second thought told me I couldn't reach it in time to gain the object I have in view. How lucky that chance has thrown me in your way at this early hour. Surely the devil is on my side."

"If not, you are on his side," remarks the renegade, with a low laugh. "But you wish to know why I am here? My story is quickly told. Over there in the interior, a few miles from this point, there are three houses standing all alone, known by the name of the 'Three Inns.' Maybe you've seen or heard of them. Well, we waded into them last night, I and this handful of braves, and these are the result."

The outlaw coolly points to a couple of gory scalps at his waist, and then to a number of others carried in a like manner by the Indians. Even Jim McCabe averts his eyes with a shudder.

"Now, your business with me?" inquires the chief.

"I will explain in a few words," says McCabe. "Last evening a family left our settlement and started down the river under cover of the darkness—removing, you see, to the first fort below. The family consists only of the old gentleman, his wife and daughter."

"Their name?" interrupts the chief.

"Is Moreland. Mr. Moreland has long been one of the leading spirits of our place," answers the other.

"You say they are removing to the first fort below?" is the next inquiry.

"Yes."

"Without an escort?"

"Oh, not by any means. They are accompanied by a round dozen of armed men. But, what of that? You outnumber them two to one, and as your braves have had a taste of blood, I am sure it has only sharpened their appetites. Fact is, the Morelands haven't completed their journey yet. They have went into camp on an island in the center of the river, where they intend spending the day. The island lies nearly opposite to this spot. It is a long, narrow strip of land, thickly wooded on each side with willow trees, and barren and rocky in the middle."

"I know which one you allude to," interposes the chief, "and know exactly where it lies. So the boating party has stopped there, eh? And your object in all this palaver is to have me go over there and stir them up?"

"That is it, precisely," replies McCabe, rubbing his hands. "They say the island affords pretty fair means for defense, but I am sure success will attend you if you fall upon them when they are not suspecting such a thing. Don't spare them. Attack and butcher the whole set—*except one*."

"And that one?"

"She is the daughter—Isabel Moreland. Don't harm her, but bring her to me, if you can possibly capture her. She is as beautiful as an oriole, and I want her for a wife. I have attempted to make her mine in a legitimate manner, but she has rejected me with scorn, and I must resort to violence or lose her."

"Want a wife, do you? Surely, then, you will not think of returning to the whites with your unwilling bride?"

"No; that would be walking into the lion's

jaws after capturing one of its cubs. Help me to get this lady, and then I will join the Indians, and make their wigwams my future home!"

"Good. But I can't make the attack in the daytime."

"I haven't asked you to."

"Yet you say the party will this evening continue their voyage?"

"I will arrange that. They think I'm their friend, you know, and I will go over to the island some time during the day, and make up a story that will induce them to remain an hour after dark, thus giving you ample time to make the attack."

The renegade reflects a moment.

"Yes, that will do," he mutters. "Prevail on them to tarry there an hour after dark, and the game is ours. Should they leave the island before we reach it, they stand a good chance of escape, for they have good boats and strong oarsmen, and can outstrip our canoes in a chase. But, do your part and I'll do mine. Those fellows," he adds, glancing at his band of warriors, "will hail with joy this chance of adding more to the number of scalps they have already taken. Yes, sir, this thing shall be done, as certain as my name is *Simon Girty*!"

CHAPTER IX.

NICK ON A TRAIL.

NICK THE DETECTIVE jumped back as if stung by an adder. Had a thunderbolt rent the cloudless sky above him, he would scarcely have been taken more by surprise than he was by the conclusion of the renegade's last remark. While listening to the conversation we have recorded, though certain the chief was not an Indian, he had not once suspected that he was lying so near that notorious traitor, who, in the last few years, had become the terror of white settlers all through Kentucky and Ohio. *Simon Girty*! That name, coupled as it is with some of the most atrocious deeds that ever darkened the pages of history, was, at that time, as familiar as household words to every ear on the border. And the hunter, as he thought of it, recalled the incident, as he had often heard it, connected with this man's desertion of his race.

All this flashed through the mind of the eavesdropper, as that well-known name struck upon his ear. But, quickly recovering from his surprise, he leaned forward again and continued his listening, now with increased interest.

"Good!" cried McCabe. "I am glad you enter into my scheme so willingly. You are a first-rate friend."

Simon Girty sneered.

"Pooh! pooh! man, you don't understand me. I doubt if I could induce myself to do this thing if you were the only one to be benefited by the massacre, although I will try to secure that girl and place her in your arms alive. Pshaw! I am not what I used to be. I would not enter so willingly in your little scheme if it did not possess the attraction of blood! Ha! ha! I'm an Indian now, and it is pastime to lift the scalps of the detested pale-faces. Ah, McCabe, experience has taught me that revenge is sweet, sweet, sweet! Depend upon it, I will see that every

mother's son of the white-livered devils becomes food for the buzzards before another dawn. But to help me to bring this about, you must do your duty by causing them to linger on the island a sufficient length of time after dark, and you will do well to put them off their guard at the same time, if you can."

"Trust me for that," rejoined McCabe, earnestly. "I will go over to them this afternoon, and the interval between this time and that shall be spent in planning the best way to deceive them. But how shall I get to them? I have no means of going out to the island, unless I swim."

"There is no need of that. Concealed in a little cove, a short distance above the island, are the canoes in which I and my warriors came over here. You will have no difficulty in finding them. Go; take one of them, sharpen your wits and play your part."

"I'll do it, by Jove! Have no fears for me. If you don't come off victorious I shall not be to blame."

"I suppose not—unless you play me false."

"And you know I will not do that."

"I am not certain."

"Well," laughed McCabe, "my deeds shall be proof of my fidelity. But where will you remain till the time for action?"

"Here," replied Girty. "I shall not leave this spot before sundown."

"Very well; you know best how to act in a case like this. I will leave you now, and as like as not I won't see you again until after the fight has taken place."

"Why? I want you to come back here toward evening, and report your success, or failure, in your part of the performance."

"All right; I will do that, if you wish."

"And, also," continued the renegade, "I hope to find you somewhere near the boats when we go to the river to embark, so that you can take part in the fight. You will make an addition of one, you know, to our side, and I have no doubt we will need your services. Of course you will be there, ready to accompany us?"

"Ye-e-es, I suppose so," was the hesitating answer. "But if I am *not* there, you need not wait for me, as you will readily understand that I am on duty at some other point. At all events, I shall not be absent when it comes to fighting."

So saying, Jim McCabe turned on his heel and walked away, while Simon Girty joined his warriors by the fire.

Nick Robbins, as soon as he saw that the conference was at an end, slid off the rock, sprung lightly to his feet, and glided swiftly away from the spot. Stopping suddenly, however, he quickly jumped behind a tree, and then he looked cautiously forth from his concealment to watch the movements of the man whose villainous plot he had overheard. He saw Jim McCabe come out of the ravine and walk leisurely off in the direction of the river, and observed the smile of evil triumph that lighted his countenance as he went.

The detective's mind was made up on the instant.

"I'll follow him," he said to himself. "I'll dog his footsteps, nor let him leave my sight."

"I'll do even more than that, for I think—yes, I'm sure—that he may be easily deceived."

He slipped out from behind the tree, and started off in the tracks of the unsuspecting ruffian, taking care to keep the latter in sight as he followed.

"Low, cowardly traitor!" he hissed, as if addressing the man in front of him. "Who would have thought you were leagued with that most terrible of the white man's enemies? Wicked as I knew you to be, I am surprised to learn that you are a friend of the Indians, and doubly so that you are a confederate of the worst apostate and murderer that ever lived. Wretch! Fiend! I cannot believe God will permit you to succeed, and if the stain on Russell Trafford's name is not purged away before the setting of to-morrow's sun, I have over-rated my ability. Poor Isabel Moreland! She shall not fall into the hands of that man if I can prevent it, nor shall the massacre be so complete as they have pictured it. I will put them on their guard, and I believe they can build fortifications that will enable them to repulse the assailants without loss. They will be astonished when I tell them Simon Girty is to lead the attack."

Thus cogitating, Nick followed the villain for some time longer, neither allowing the distance between them to diminish nor increase. At length Jim McCabe emerged from the woods, and stood upon the bank of the river.

Nick did not hesitate then, but strode boldly forward and, without the least ceremony, laid his hand on McCabe's shoulder.

CHAPTER X.

THE TWO SCOUTS.

ON this same morning another fire had been kindled for the preparation of breakfast. This one is at least a mile below the Indian encampment, and, unlike the latter, is close to the bank of the river, where the rufescent flames cast a reddish light upon the water. Hemmed in on three sides by a semi-circular ledge of rocks, this fire cannot be seen from any other point than the river in front, or its opposite shore. And the author of it has shown his slyness and knowledge of Indian perspicacity by using the material that causes the smoke to become very nearly invisible by the time it reaches the height of the rock. As we have intimated, the fourth side of the glen opens toward the river, and the least experienced in wild life could not but be struck with the appropriateness for a camping-ground, or a place of concealment from the savages.

It is used for both this morning. There is but one man in the glen, a grizzled old hunter, whose stature and general appearance approach the gigantic, and he sits quietly by his fire, busily engaged in roasting a wild duck. The man is Kirby Kidd. This we instantly observe as we look upon his honest brown face, with its clear, penetrating eyes, long, shaggy beard, and its expression of candor, simplicity, and good humor. A disposition of kindness and plain truthfulness is one of Kirby Kidd's characteristics, and it is ever reflected, not only in his countenance, but also in his words and deeds, winning the love of all whom he meets on a

friendly footing. As he sits on the ground with his trusty rifle lying across his lap, preparing his morning meal with that skill that can only be the result of experience, he frequently lifts his head and darts a glance at the opening in the rocks, so searching that nothing within its scope escapes notice. True, he might do this at any other time, through force of habit, but on this occasion a keen observer would detect more than ordinary anxiety in his look.

"Time Wapawah was back," mutters the ranger at last. "He went away before daylight an' said he wouldn't be gone long, but the sun's up now, and still he don't show his noddle. Mold me into buckshot ef 'tain't beginnin' to look a trifle suspicious! Maybe the cuss have poked his mug into some sort of a diffikilty, an' needs the 'sistance o' these arms, while I'm a-setting hyur as cool as a cucumber in Jinawary, toastin' this duck fur the good o' my stummick. A cuter red don't walk the 'arth, I allow, but thar's times when the oldest on 'em gets hauled in. Bah! I might gab in that strain from now till the world comes to an eend, an' I'd never make myself believe the cuss could be so blind as to put his foot in a trap. In course thar's Injun sign ev'rywhar jest now, but that don't signify danger to him. Sunkthin' different from that keeps him away, bet my skulp on't, an' when he does kum he'll have a chapter o' news to relate, or I miss my guess. I wonder whar Nick Robbins are 'bout this time? He! he! ho! That 'ar coon's sharper'n a steel-trap, an' he's did first rate so fur, but I'm a leetle afeard he's goin' too fast to succeed. Time'll show, howsomever, an' ef I ain't powerful mistook the thing will kum out all right in the eend. Wish the Injun 'u'd return. I ain't oneasy, 'cause he knowed the woods wur full o' sign 'fore he went out, an' it don't stan' to reason 'ut he'll be keerless; but then I want to hear what he's l'arned."

The fowl being by this time well-roasted, the scout now removes it from the ramrod, which serves as a spit, and falls to devouring it with a keen relish.

But he had scarcely commenced this when, with the quickness of thought, he drops the duck and snatches up his rifle. At the same time he turns his piercing eyes toward the river, as if trying to see something that is not there. What he hears is only a low ripple in the water—or a sound, rather, as of a fish leaping above the surface—but the experienced ear of Kirby Kidd does not recognize it as such. He sits still and listens, with his gun pushed forward ready to leap to his shoulder on a second's notice. Soon the smothered croak of a bull-frog, three times in succession, comes from the water's edge. Instantly the hunter's face brightens up with a gleam of recognition, and, running his fingers across his lips while he whistles, he trills forth a soft imitation of the robin's song.

Now a tufted head rises slowly into view, followed by the body of an Indian. The savage slips lightly up on the bank, without further hesitation, and walks toward the fire with a graceful, dignified step, exhibiting a form of faultless mold and muscular development.

It is Wapawah, the friend and companion of the white hunter.

"Wal, chief," says the ranger, "ye've been

gone long 'nough to l'arn how the ground lies outside o' this hole. Cuss me, ef I hadn't begun to think some bloody cuss had tuk a notion to them feathers o' yourn."

"Me busy," replied the Wyandott, briefly.

"Sart'in ye wur. Mought knowed nothin' else 'u'd keep you away, arter sayin' ye'd be back in a hurry. Thar's Injuns around, but ye're an Injun yerself, an' sharp enough to keep out o' thar clutches, I take it. But how did ye succeed, chief? I s'pose the party reached the island in safety long 'fore mornin'?"

"Yes—dey all dere."

"Did ye go over to the island?"

Wapawah nods his head.

"Did, eh? Found 'em all safe, too? How many be they?"

Wapawah holds up both hands with the fingers extended, signifying ten. Then, by doubling down all but the index finger on the left hand, he reduces the number to six.

"Sixteen in all," says the ranger, who understands the Indian's signs perfectly, "sixteen in all. Thar's jest one more'n I thort they wur. Who's the sixteenth pusson?"

"He the Yankee," replies the Indian, the faintest shadow of a smile flitting across his dusky visage.

"The Yankee!" repeats the white man, in some surprise. "He! he! ho! are *he* with 'em?"

"Yes."

"Wal, that's more'n I s'pected he'd do. Don't like to see the chap git so bold. Did ye tell 'em we wur goin' to j'ine 'em?"

"Yes; told we stay with 'em all day."

"Guess we'd better about it, then. D'ye see this roasted bird, chief? Big 'nough to fill us both, ain't it? Help yerself, an' let us be off 'thout any unnecessary waste o' time."

"Wait," interrupts the Indian. "Got more to tell—let Kidd listen."

"Got more to tell!" The scout drops the duck again. "Out with it, then. What more have ye see'd?"

"Injuns," is the calm reply. "Me see band of Injuns—on war-path—all hab guns—some hab pale-faces' scalp."

"Whar did ye see 'em?"

The warrior points up the river.

"Now, mold me into buckshot, ef this ain't gittin' interestin'. D'ye know what tribe the Injuns belong to?"

"Wyandott."

"Some o' yer own fellers, be they? What are they 'way down hyur fur? Reckon, though, they've come down on one o' thar maraudin' tramps, durn thar ugly picters."

"De chief, he no Wyandott," continues the Indian; "he not red-man, 'tall. He long-knife."

"Led by a white man, be they?"

"Yes—Simon Girty!"

"Mold me into buckshot!" Kirby Kidd rises to his feet with this ejaculation. "Yer don't mean ter tell me Simon Girty are the leader o' the war-party ye're talkin' 'bout?"

"Dat what Wapawah say—Wapawah know Simon Girty well—see him much time at Sandusky."

Kirby Kidd made no reply to this, but, relapsing into a thoughtful mood, leans on his

rifle and gazes fixedly into the fire. At length he arouses himself from his reverie, and says:

"Chief, yer knows as well as I that them folks on the island are in a powerful sight o' danger, ef that renegade, Girty, are circ'latin' in these parts on the war-path."

"Wapawah knows," affirms the Indian.

"Wal, then, the sooner we add our two selves to the party the better it'll be for them. How many reds did yer see, countin' Girty?"

The Indian explains with his fingers, signifying thirty-two.

"The number o' our enemies is less'n I s'posed," the ranger resumes, "but we'll do no harm by j'inein' of 'em, so't we kin help 'em git ready to meet an attack. Reckon the reds know they're thar?"

"No, t'ink not. Hear dem talk—dey say nothing 'bout long-knives—t'ink dey don't know where dey be."

"Then ye may bet yer moccasins 'ut they won't be long findin' out. They'll cross the river in the vicinity o' the island, won't they?"

"No; dey 'bove de island—heap 'bove it—half mile, guess."

"So fur? Maybe they will miss it, then. If they does, so much better fur our friends, but, in any case, I can't help thinkin' we ort to be among 'em. Come, chief; let's eat quick an' be off."

When the two scouts had done justice to the roast duck, they at once enter their bark canoe, which they always keep concealed at this place, and begin to guide it toward the island, that lies about half a mile distant up the river.

CHAPTER XI.

GAME AND GAME.

REMEMBERING his guilt and natural cowardice, we may well suppose that Jim McCabe was not a little frightened when he felt a hand laid rather heavily upon his shoulder. But, when he sprung round to face his fancied challenger, and saw only the face of Nick Robbins, which had become entirely expressionless within the last few seconds, he drew a deep breath of relief, and felt his fears fading.

"What do you mean, sir, by striking me in this unwarrantable manner?" he demanded, angrily.

"Strikin' ye!" drawled Robbins, taking a step backward and regarding the man with a show of astonishment in his actions, if not in his face. "Durn it, man, I didn't strike ye, as I knows of. I only laid my paw on yer shoulder to 'tract yer 'tention."

"Attract my attention, indeed!" snarled McCabe. "You chose a very mild way to do it. You will oblige me, sir, by acting a little less familiarly toward me in future."

"Will I, though?"

"Silence, fool! I meant exactly what I said, and I further do when I tell you that another impudent word will be uttered at your peril. I am in no enviable mood, just now, and am not to be trifled with. Go your way, and leave me to go mine."

For a full minute the gaze of the detective never left the eyes of the speaker, after the latter had finished his exclamations. But at the

end of that time a smile, that might have been of contempt, curled his lip, and he broke the silence:

"See hyur, stranger," he said, in a low, impressiye voice, "does yer know who an' what I am?"

"I only know that you are called Nick Robbins," replied McCabe, somewhat taken aback by the hunter's words and manner.

"Wal, it's lucky fur ye 'ut ye don't know me better'n that, 'cause ef ye did, an' should speak to me in that style, I'd knock yer from hyur to Christmas, ye blamed blow-fly! What d'ye take me fur, anyhow? Let me tell yer 'tain't goin' to pay yer to make an enemy o' me. Why, younker, don't ye know 'ut I can upset that little scheme o' yourn in a jiffy—"

"What scheme?" gasped McCabe, in considerable alarm.

"What scheme! Ha! ha! ha! Yer knows well enough what scheme, ye blasted scape-gallows! Hain't yer jest been talkin' to Simon Girty 'bout a gang o' white people as are campin' on that island down yander? and didn't ye tell him ye wanted ever mother's son o' 'em slaughtered, 'ceptin' one purty female, an' she wur to be captur'd fur yer wife?"

"Good God! how did you learn this?"

"How a'ye s'pose?" asked the hunter, with a leer.

"It's all a base lie!" vociferated the ruffian.

"You don't know what you are talking about!"

"Easy, my friend," said the detective, coolly.

"I ain't used to bein' called a liar by anybody, an' I can't stand it. I'm a right docile chap long as nobody crosses my path, but when once't I git my dander riz, I can't git it down ag'in till I've bent some pusson's ear. Now, ye won't make anything by denyin' this 'ut I've 'cused ye of, for this reason: I heerd every word o' yer conversation with Simon Girty. Jest reflect a minute, an' ye'll agree that I'd make a better friend than enemy, knowin' what I do, so ye'll do well to curb that tongue o' yourn 'fore ye ruffle my feathers."

"There is something behind your words I don't understand," said McCabe, after searching in vain for the "something" in the never-changing countenance of the hunter.

"Is, hey? Ef that's the case, I'll jest give yer understandin' a lift. As I said afore, I heerd every word that passed 'twixt you an' Girty, an' in course I must 'a' been clus' by to hear. You say ye don't know me, 'ceptin' my name are Robbins?"

"I said so."

"Do anybody else suspicion more?"

"I have never heard of any such suspicion."

"Good. Now, younker, look at me clus'. Do I look as though I mought be disguised?"

"Disguised!"

"Yas."

"Why, sir, it never occurred to me that you were."

"Jest what I tho'rt. I've pulled the wool over more'n one feller's eyes. An onkimmon 'cute chap, who b'ars the handle o' Kirby Kidd, thinks I'm his truest friend, an' has the utmost confidence both in my faithfulness an' my skill as an Injun-fighter. Fur all that, I am disguised, whether I look like it or no."

Jim McCabe was so astonished that he could not reply, and, observing this, the hunter continued:

"Maybe ye'd like to know what I am, since I ain't what I seem? I'll tell yer. Besides bein' Nick Robbins, I am the companion, the confederate, the right bower o' Simon Girty!"

He paused a moment to note the effect of these words upon his hearer, and then went on:

"I see ye're kinder amazed to hear this, but I'll prove it to yer in the fraction of a second. I find it handy to pretend friendship to 'arst the whites, though in reality I'm leagued with the Injuns, an' am workin' fur 'em the full time. This mornin' I wur ever thar in the ravine with Girty and the red-skins, when we see'd ye comin' that way. Girty said how't ye's a friend o' his'n, but I recognized ye as a man from the settlement whar I've been lodgin' lately, an' bein' sorter afeard ye'd expose me to the whites ef ye sot yer peepers on me, I perlutely hid my carcass behind a big stun'. I heerd all ye said, an' found out ye wur 'bout as big a rascal as myself. Ha! ha! ha! When you went away I come out from the stun', an' told Simon I wur goin' to foller ye, an' have a chat with ye 'bout this little affair. He told me I'd better not, that ye mought take it into yer head to expose me to the whites, but I argued that I had ye too much in my power to admit o' yer doin' sech a thing. So I follered ye, and hyur I am. D'ye know what I'm hyur fur? I'll tell ye. Ye calc'late on j'inin' the whites as tha'r friend, an' inducin' 'em by some trick to remain an hour or so arter dark. Now, I knows they ain't got a very high opinion o' you, an' it's all but likely they'd ketch ye in yer own trap. On t'other hand, ef I should go to the island I'd stand a better chance o' success. They all know me, an' have faith in everything I say, an' even Mr. Moreland hisself labors under the belief 'ut he an' I are fast friends."

Jim McCabe fell to thinking at this, and the result of his thinking was a firm belief in all the hunter had said.

"I beg your pardon," he said, grasping Nick's hand, "for the rude manner in which I spoke to you a moment since. I regret that I was so hasty, and assure you I should not have acted so had I even suspected that you had followed me for my own good."

"Wal, we won't speak o' that now," said Nick, good-humoredly. "Ef I hadn't understood why ye acted that-a-way, I should 'a' knocked ye cl'ar up through the crown o' yer hat; but I understood perfectly how it wur. Let it pass; it 'mounts to nothin'. Reckon ye're willin' to have me take this fur a sign o' friendship?"

"Certainly, sir—certainly! I am most happy to find a man of my own color who partakes of my sentiments with regard to the great injustice offered to the race who first held possession of this land. I should never have suspected that you were such, however, had you not told me. Your disguise is complete, and you are supposed to be a harmless old rover, when in truth you are the deadly enemy of the very ones who have so much faith in your harmlessness."

"That 'are's 'bout the long an' short of it,

younger. The Injuns call me a sly old fox, an' I s'pose the name are a good 'un."

"You could have no better," said McCabe, who had already been thrown into a very good humor by this man.

"Wal," said the hunter, quietly, "I hope we understand each other, anyhow. Shill I perform the part o' throwin' the whites off tha'r guard, or would ye ruther do it yerself?"

He put this question in a careless sort of a way, and, as he spoke, glanced lazily down the river at the island, which lay at least half a mile below the spot where they stood.

"To be sure, I am willing that you should perform the duty imposed upon me," answered McCabe, who was only too glad to have the responsibility taken from his own shoulders. "I believe you are more capable of doing it than I, since you better understand the art of deceiving. You give ample proof of that every day."

"Ef I'm to do that part o' the job," said the hunter, "I jest stays hyur with you till arter noon, an' then I takes the trip to the island an' back."

"Very well. I shall be glad to have you remain here with me, as I detest solitude. But, my friend, since you belong to that band of Indians, perhaps you know where to find their canoes? Girty said they were concealed somewhere in this vicinity—can you tell me where?"

"Oh, sart'inly!" was the prompt reply. "I know egzactly whar the boats are hid. They're skeercely a dozen feet from hyur."

As he spoke, he took two or three long strides down the sloping bank to a little cove that extended a few yards inland. Here he stooped and parted the bushes, revealing to the eyes of Jim McCabe five Indian canoes, with their paddles lying in them. Truth is, while conversing with McCabe, Nick Robbins had seen the prow of one of these protruding from the bushes, and the discovery, unimportant in itself, went to prove more clearly to his new acquaintance that he really was connected with the Indians.

"Thar they be," he said; "all safe an' ready for use."

"So I see. Of course you will take one of them on your mission to the island?"

"In course! I'll have to, or swim."

The two men now seated themselves beneath the wide-spreading branches of a tree, at a point where they had a good view of the island, there to await the time for action. To hear their conversation, one would judge their acquaintance was rapidly ripening into friendship, as they went so far as to almost make confidants of each other, and chatted as familiarly as if they had been on intimate terms for a number of years. In fact, Jim McCabe believed he had found a trustworthy friend in the old hunter, and reposed more and more confidence in him every moment, and, to all appearance, Nick was similarly worked upon.

The hours dragged slowly by, and at last the sun passed the zenith, ushering in a sultry afternoon.

Nick Robbins waited no longer, but stepped

into one of the Indian canoes and sent it skimming down the river toward the island.

McCabe watched him with eager eyes as he paddled away, and felt a thrill of exultation as he thought how nicely things were working in his favor. Surely, fortune was smiling upon him!

The hunter was absent a full hour. The wretch on shore had lost his patience, and was beginning to entertain a suspicion that all was not right, when he saw Robbins put out from the head of the island and come rowing slowly back.

"Well?" he asked, as soon as the boat touched the shore. "How did you succeed?"

"Succeed?" exclaimed Nick, in a tone of joyful triumph, as he stepped out of the light craft and shoved it under the bushes with the rest. "Succeed, did yer say? By thunder! the game's ours! We've got 'em in our clutches already, an' we've only to wait till the comin' o' night to pick tha'r feathers. We couldn't hope fur better success. The durned cusses are goin' to stay thar 'bout two hours arter dark, an' I warrant they won't be on tha'r guard. 'cause I've made 'em b'lieve thar ain't no Injuns 'thin fifty mile of 'em. Kirby Kidd an' Wapawah wur both thar, an' they was sucked in as easy as t'others. Yes, kumrid, they're our game, sure's shootin'."

"Good!" cried McCabe, slapping his thigh. "You're a trump, my friend, and if, through your exertions, I come in possession of the proud beauty, Isabel Moreland, I shall ever feel indebted to you. But I will go at once and tell Girty how well we have succeeded so far. You remember he told me to report? I presume you will remain here, and keep watch until I return?"

But Nick Robbins made no reply to this. He had become suddenly very silent and very grave, and he even seemed to be struck with alarm!

McCabe, however, failed to observe this, and flinging his rifle across his shoulder, he started away, whistling gleefully.

"Stop!" called out the hunter, hesitatingly. "Had—hadn't I better go, an' let you stay hyur?"

"No," replied McCabe, cheerfully. "I wish to speak to Girty about something else and may as well go myself."

And so saying, he resumed his whistling and walked on.

"By Heaven!" exclaimed the hunter, when he was left alone, and he dropped the butt of his gun upon the ground in a half-despairing sort of a way. "Can it be that I am going to fail after all? He has gone to report to Simon Girty what we have done, and of course my name will be mentioned, and I will be exposed. What shall I do? There is no room to hope that he will not speak to Girty of me. Why did I not think of this before? Alas! I fear my project is nipped in the bud, and, if so, my life is in danger. The villain may come back at the head of a dozen Indians, to make mince-meat of me for my deception, and yet I must wait for him at all hazards."

The hunter was evidently sorely troubled. He threw himself upon the ground to await the return of McCabe, and was so nervous and restless

he could not lie still. He trembled in a state of feverish impatience, and every minute seemed an hour to him.

At last McCabe came trudging back. He was entirely alone, and whistling as gleefully as when he had gone away. Nick Robbins rose to meet him eagerly, feeling the first spark of hope he had felt since the fellow's departure. He gazed keenly at the whistling profligate as he came up, but saw nothing that told him his artifice had been discovered.

"Well, what news?" he asked, with as much calmness as was just then at his command.

"News?" said McCabe, in some surprise, "news? Why, really, sir, what sort of news have you been expecting?"

"I mean—what did Girty have to say?"

"Oh, Girty was not there," answered the fellow, stretching himself on the grass. "He and one of his braves had started in chase of a deer just before I reached the ravine, and so I was obliged to leave my report to be delivered by the Indians."

A fierce thrill of delight pervaded the whole being of Robbins at this intelligence, and he was compelled to turn his head away to conceal his joyful emotion!

CHAPTER XII.

THE MEETING IN THE WOOD.

THE afternoon waned, and the sun went down behind the gold and crimson clouds that blended their brilliant hues in the Western sky.

Night came on apace, and still the two men remained on the spot where the canoes of the Indians were concealed. Jim McCabe, however, began to grow restless, and it was plain that he wished to say something to his companion, which fear of the result prevented him from doing. He coughed and "abem'd" ran his trembling fingers through his hair, cast frequent glances through the darkening woods, in the direction of the ravine, and then amused himself by thrusting his hands into his pockets and pacing up and down with quick, nervous tread. Though fully understanding these demonstrations of uneasiness, and scarcely able to repress a smile in consequence thereof, yet Nick Robbins seemed to be entirely ignorant of the change that had taken place in his would-be friend. At last the troubled man appeared to have made up his mind. He stopped right in front of the hunter, and blurted out:

"I say, Nick, shall we stay here until the Indians come, and join them in their attack on the whites?"

"Why not?" coolly asked the hunter. "Wa'n't that the agreement 'twixt you an' Girty? Didn't yer say as ye'd be hyur when they come, to embark, ready to take part in the fightin'?"

"Not exactly. I told him I should be here if I was nowhere else, but, to be frank, it was my intention to be somewhere else."

"What? ye ain't afeard, be yer?"

"Oh, no! not in the least," was the quick rejoinder. "It isn't fear that urges me to keep out of the fight, but stronger and better reasons. You see, I'm deeply, madly in love, and cannot run the risk of losing the bewitching beauty I have taken so much pains to secure. Suppose I should go into the fight and get killed; where

would be the reward for my labor? And what would become of the girl? Besides all this, if the Indians should, by any chance, be defeated, and I captured, I should be strung up to the nearest tree for the part I had taken in the conflict. Don't you see?"

Nick Robbins seemed to meditate. After a while he asked:

"Wal, what d'ye propose to do?"

"Before answering that question," said McCabe, "I should like to know whether you are going to take part in the massacre or not?"

"It have been my intention to do so all along, but ef you don't I don't, that's sart'in."

"Very good. I will suggest, then, that we move down the bank of the river about half a mile, or whatever the distance may be, and take our stand just opposite the island."

"What then?"

"Just this: we can lie there in concealment and watch, or, rather, listen to, the battle on the water, and when it is all over, we can join our white friend and his dusky crew, and make them believe it was simply impossible for us to be present at the massacre."

"Why d'ye want to go so fur down the river as to be opposite the island?"

"Only that we may be near the scene of the conflict, where we shall be able to note its progress and termination."

Nick Robbins knit his brows, and seemed to meditate again. Then, with a slight show of perplexity, he said:

"Tell yer what, kumrid, my brain are kinder muddled this evenin', an' I kin skeercely decide how to act. Yer perposes to take no part in the tussle, an' I make no doubt yer reasons fur slidin' out of it are good, but, on second thort, I don't know whether I ort to shirk my duty or not. With you I reckon it's all right, but what cause have I fur not 'tendin' to my duty?"

"Pooh! it isn't going to hurt you to tell a lie, if you find it necessary to offer an excuse for your absence."

"Nevertheleast, I ain't in the habit o' doin' that. I don't want to make em' think I'm a coward, 'cause thar ain't nothin' 'ut I'm afeard of. Tell ye what I'll do. You kin go on down the river, an' leeve me hyur to think awhile. Ef I decides to stay with yer, I'll foller in a few minutes, but ef I don't, I'll wait hyur fur the Injuns, an' go with them. How will that suit yer?"

"That suits me very well," replied McCabe. "But I sincerely hope you will decide to follow me."

The delighted villain, glad to get away from the place where the savages were to embark on their errand of death, turned on his heel and quickly took his departure, making the river-bank his guide as he hurried away to the point designated.

Nick watched his receding form until it was lost to view in the purple twilight, and then, finding himself once more alone, he sat down on a log and buried his face in his hands to think.

His sole object in lingering behind was to be alone for a while with his thoughts. Of course he had no intention of joining the savages in their attack on his friends, though he had made such a pretense to the poor dupe McCabe. Hav-

ing carried out his plan successfully so far, he wished to bring the latter part of it to perfect maturity before proceeding further, in order to prevent such a thing as running into an unlooked-for difficulty, which he had done once already. To do this he desired a few minutes of solitude, that he might think it all over undisturbed, and it was for this reason alone that he sent McCabe on ahead.

For a long time he sat there on the log, lost in study, and when at last he rose to his feet, the mellow twilight had deepened into the blacker shades.

Surprised to find that he had tarried there so long, the hunter snatched up his gun and hastened away in the direction McCabe had taken. He was pleased with the latter's proposition to keep out of the fight, as it prevented the suspicion that might have been excited by such a one being offered by himself. They could station themselves on the shore directly opposite the island, and, with their ears, note the commencement, end and result of the contemplated contest. Thus he reflected as he walked along the river-bank through the gathering darkness of night, and a strange smile twitched the beard that covered his mouth, as he muttered:

"Result, indeed! Ha! ha! ha! It will be a far different result from that which *he* expects, for Kirby Kidd and Wapawah would not have been caught napping even if I had failed to put them on their guard. Kidd declared that, if the rest of the party would follow strictly the directions of himself and Wapawah, they could defeat the assailants without the loss of a man, and I believe he spoke the truth."

Nick now ended his soliloquy, and brought his mind down to the present. He walked on some distance further, with long, rapid strides, and at length became aware that he had reached the point he was aiming for. Off to his right he could see the shadowy outlines of the island. He came to a dead halt. Where was Jim McCabe? He looked around him, but saw only the frowning tree-trunks on one side, and the glistening water on the other. It was quite dark now, and the only luminaries visible were the myriads of twinkling stars that bespangled the blue canopy above. He was about to move on, when his footsteps were arrested by a loud, angry voice, exclaiming:

"So you have been following me, have you?—you accursed brat! And you now hint that you will proclaim me a murderer to the world rather than see me accomplish my purpose."

The speaker was undoubtedly Jim McCabe!

"Faith, Jamie, I haven't been follerin' iv yeez, at all, at all," said another voice, in rich Irish brogue. With astonishment the hunter recognized this one as that of the boy, Mike Terry! He stood perfectly quiet, and listened.

"What, rascal! Will you say you have not been following me? Tell me, then, how came you here?"

"Begorra, how should I know ye were in this part iv the counthry? An' av I did know, why should I be afther follerin' iv yeez? It's goin' crazy you are, to be sure, an' Mike Terry won't have any thing more to do wid the likes iv yeez. Tell ye why I'm here? Av course I

will. I'm this fur on me way to that fort—phat ye call it?—where the Moreland family is movin' to."

"And why are you going there?"

"I'm goin' there to live, yer Honor."

"To live! Why don't you stay where you have so long been living?"

"Fur this raisin. Whiniver I walk can't help seein' the place where Doctor Trafford's house stood, an' it makes me fale as if I was his murderer, sure. Nayther can I go outside iv the stockade uniliss something l'ades me straight to the grave av Masther Russell. I'm goin' away now, so I'll niver be throubled by these sights ag'in. Musha! musha! the payple used to say Mike Terry was a first-class b'y, but he's a rascal an' a spalpeen now, an' yerself it was that made me that, an' it's me own cousin ye are, too."

"Fool! will you cease your whining? Suppose you have done a rascally act by telling a lie in my defense; I have paid you well for it, and am willing to pay you more. You won't have my money? Well, that is your fault, not mine. The fact that I killed Doctor Trafford, and caused the death of his nephew, need not trouble you, as the only thing you did was to swear that Russell was the murderer. Now that I have confided in you so far as to tell you that I am striving to get Isabel Moreland in my power, you say something to the effect that you will go over to the encampment of the whites, and disclose my whole secret."

"Divil a bit did I say that, Jamie. I only s'id the poor craythers ought to be warned iv their danger, an' I'll say it ag'in av I want to. It ain't me as'll warn 'em, though, fur I have no boat, at all, an' divil a sthroke can I swim. L'ave 'em alone. They're not doin' any harrum to anybody."

"Bah! you talk nonsense, Mike. I shall not leave them alone, so long as my suit is rejected by the fair daughter of Mr. Moreland. Look you, boy! it is just possible that those red-skins will be defeated to-night, and if they should be, I will of course, go back home. In that case, I will live in constant fear that you will betray me. To make sure that you will not do this, I want you now to take a solemn oath that you will never breathe a word of my secret to mortal ears!"

"Oh, don't ax me to do that?"

"Ask, indeed! I *command* you to do it! Down on your knees and swear that you will forever hold your tongue on this subject."

"No, no, no! I can't swear that, at all, at all. Maybe I'll have to tell some time, to save me own life."

"Swear!"

"No—oh, no!"

"Idiot! do you refuse?"

"Yis, Jamie, I'll have to refuse."

"Then, by the gods, you shall *die*! Do you hear? *you shall die*! Look at this knife! It shall cut your infernal heart out, unless you immediately swear secrecy—"

"Oh, don't—don't! In the name iv the Howly Vargin, ye wouldn't be afther murtherin' iv me? Don't, dear cousin; pl'ase don't!"

"Then you will swear?"

"Never! Cut me heart out, av ye will, but

don't ax me to take sich an oath as that. Kill me, cousin, an' do it quick! I'm a wicked b'y an' deserve to be kilt, but I shall niver listen to yer blarney ag'in, though it should save me life a hundred times!"

Thus far, Nick Robbins had listened to the conversation without moving from his tracks, but now, fearing the monster would carry out his dire threat, he thought the time for action had come. Beginning to hum a popular air, and dropping his gun to a trail, he walked boldly forward through the thick underbrush, creating as much noise as possible in the act. A few steps took him to a small opening in the woods, where Jim McCabe and the Irish boy, Mike Terry, were standing.

"Hello! what have we hyur?" exclaimed the hunter, stopping short and staring, with well-feigned surprise, at the lad.

McCabe was evidently somewhat flurried by the appearance of Robbins, but he managed to answer:

"Why, upon my word, you startled me, old fellow. Where did you come from so suddenly? You have been so long a while in making up your mind to follow me, that I had almost despaired of seeing you again very soon. That boy? Oh, he's my cousin, Mike Terry. Come Mike; look up. Don't you believe, I found him lying here asleep."

"Did, hey? What's he hyur fur?"

"He's been searching for me, I presume. He is always wandering about and getting lost."

"'Pears to me this is a bad place fur a chap o' his heft to be strollin' 'round alone," said the hunter, gazing as closely and curiously at the boy as if he had never seen him before.

"My sentiments, precisely," laughed McCabe, "and for that reason I think we had better keep him under our protection, now he's here."

"Ye'll do no sich a thing," spoke up Mike, firmly. "It isn't the likes iv yeez that'll kape me here two minutes longer, unless ye ties me feet. I won't stay here so close to the poor craythers that's goin' to be kilt intirely be the lots iv red niggers in yer employ."

The lad was sidling away as he spoke, and looked as if he were about to take to his heels. Observing this, Nick Robbins stepped quickly forward and seized him by the arm.

"Hold on, younker," he said. "It's the opinion o' this coon 'ut ye'll be a deal safer by stayin' with us."

Then, stooping down, he whispered to the lad:

"Keep mum. I am not the friend of that man, nor the enemy of those on the island! Stay with me and you are safe!"

The young Hibernian shot a glance of mingled amazement and gratitude at the speaker, but said nothing in reply. The hunter turned carelessly away, and began to converse with McCabe, while Mike Terry, watching them with a strange expression in his blue eyes, quietly seated himself on a stone, as if he had never had a thought of running away from the two men!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ISLAND FIGHT.

"ISN'T it time for them to make the attack?" said Jim McCabe, who was all impatience now that the time was drawing near,

"No," replied Robbins; "it hain't been dark more'n an hour."

"What of that? You know Simon Girty is not the man to be tardy on occasions like this."

"Know that," replied Robbins, "but neither is he the man to hurry when success depends on deliberation."

"Very true," drawled the profligate, musingly, "and yet my only fear is that they will find the island deserted."

"Ef that's yer only fear ye may jest dispense with it to onc't, 'cause the birds ain't thunk o' flyin' yit," said Robbins, confidently, and then with a smile that the darkness concealed, he added to himself: "Ah, my fine fellow, if you knew all you would have yet another fear, that would be a source of more trouble than this."

But, not knowing all, McCabe had no other fear, and even the one that had taken possession of him was partially dispelled by the words of his companion. He had learned to trust the hunter so completely that nothing short of ocular proof could have convinced him of his deceptiveness.

The two men stood on the bank of the river, watching and waiting, while Mike Terry still sat on the same stone near by, watching and waiting too. Jim McCabe was impatient and restless.

"Girty is slow," he exclaimed. "I wish he would hurry. I wonder if he thinks he has the whole night in which to do this job?"

He paused for a reply, but, receiving none, continued:

"I wish the thing was over, and I had my future wife in my arms. Confound the luck! I believe the man has drawn his men off without even attempting the massacre. If I but had the Indians under my command for a short time, I'd spread desolation over the face of the waters. I wonder what time it is?"

Still the hunter did not reply, but stood like a statue, gazing out on the river, his eyes gleaming like coals of fire.

"Robbins, what time is it?" cried McCabe, in a higher key, determined to make him answer.

"How do I know?" was the gruff response. "D'ye s'pose I've got a time-piece? an' ef I had one, d'ye s'pose I could see it? I advise ye to keep yer meat-trap shet ef yer don't want to git yerself in trouble. Yer talks as if thar's nobody 'thin a mile of us."

This rebuff had the desired effect. The restless ruffian became quiet without another word, and for awhile the profoundest silence reigned over the trio.

Presently Nick Robbins seized his companion's arm, and whispered:

"Hist! Didn't ye hear that?"

"What?" asked McCabe, excitedly.

"Why, a plash in the water out yander," said Robbins, pointing. "I heerd it, sure's shootin'."

"So did I," said Mike Terry, who had sprung to his feet at the sound.

"An' it wur caused by nothin' else but by a keerless stroke of a paddle," continued Robbins, emphatically. "The Injuns are on the river, an' on thar way to the island, that's sart'in."

"Do you think so?" asked McCabe, hurriedly.

"Don't think nothin' 'bout it—I know it."

"Good! Then the crisis will come immedi-

ately. Ugh! won't it be a terrible slaughter? The whites little dream that death is so near to them, and momentarily drawing nearer."

"An' the Injuns little dream what is in store for *them*," thought the hunter, but the thought was not expressed. He added aloud: "Yas, thar's goin' to be hullsale destruction in less'n a minute, an' the victims have no idea what's goin' to happen."

"Be the saints! I'm wishin' there wasn't goin' to be any bloodshed, at all," said the Irish boy, clasping his hands.

"Nick," whispered McCabe, close to the ranger's ear, and his voice was husky and unsteady, "Robbins, they have surely had time to reach the island, if it was them you heard. Why don't they begin the slaughter? Do you think—*Good Lord!*"

While he was speaking he had been looking out toward the island, straining eyes and ears to catch some sight or sound. The cause of the exclamation with which he interrupted himself, was a bright sheet of fire that suddenly flashed out through the darkness, followed quickly by the simultaneous reports of several rifles! Then there rose shriek upon shriek of mortal agony—groans deep and fearful—wild, piercing death-yells—mingled with the appalling war-cry of the assailants; all sounding hideous in the extreme, in the silent hours of the night! But, amid these noises, not a single white man's voice could be heard.

"What does it mean?" gasped McCabe, clutching the hunter's shoulder. "Surely, surely, they are not being defeated by the whites, and yet it sounds more like a defeat than a victory!"

"Keep cool," admonished the backwoodsman, shaking off the grasp of the excited man; "jest keep cool, an' I'll tell yer what I thinks. The Injuns *are* gittin' licked, sure's shootin', though it's the qu'arest thing I ever heern tell on. That first volley was from the guns o' the pale-faces, an' it's plain to me 'ut the reds are gittin' the wu'st o' tha'r little game. It's sing'lar, I allow, but the whites have been put on tha'r guard somehow or other, 'cause—"

The sentence was destined to remain unfinished, for at that moment another fiery jet flamed up in the impending gloom, followed by another crash of firearms, as a second volley was poured into the assailants from those on the island. It must have been as destructive as the first, for there were more shrieks, and groans, and yells, and this time there was a plunging and floundering in the water, as if one or more canoes had been overturned.

The trio on the shore stood and listened in silence. Nick Robbins pretended to be as much astonished as his companion, though in reality he was secretly exulting over the success of his counterplot. The rage, fear, surprise and disappointment that took possession of Jim McCabe, was so overwhelming in their ebullition that he could not speak, and, like one struck dumb, he stood and stared, his labored respiration the only sound he made. That the Indians were being repulsed with heavy loss there was not the least room for doubt, and that this unexpected result was caused by previous preparations on the part of the whites to meet the

attack, was equally plain to the ruffian's mind. He did not blame Robbins with this—he could not believe him capable of such treachery! He realized how fully Robbins had established himself in his favor and confidence, and felt as though he would be willing to stake his life that the man was truly his friend, and the friend of the Indians. And yet his scheme was certainly a failure. Isabel Moreland, whom he had thought almost in his power, was not to be his after all. He ground his teeth, and his eyes gleamed like those of a wild beast, but he could not find words to express his feelings, so he was silent.

The carnage on the river was kept up for a few short moments. Shots were fired at irregular intervals by both sides, our trio noting every flash and crack of the guns, and listening keenly for the result. From the uncertain foundation of what they heard—or, rather, did *not* hear—they deduced the opinion that none of the whites were hurt, while they knew that among the savages there was a fearful destruction of life. The whoops and screams and groans were continued, but they gradually grew weaker and weaker, until at last not a sound could be heard save the steady gurgle and swash of the mighty Ohio, as it swept onward in its unceasing flow toward the great "Father of Waters." The fight was at an end, and silence once more brooded over the river.

No sooner had the sounds of the brief conflict ceased than Nick made a singular movement. Suddenly throwing out both of his arms, he seized Jim McCabe and Mike Terry by their clothing, and began to drag them back by main force from the water's edge. A short distance from the bank he stopped and exclaimed:

"Down on yer faces—quick!"

"Wha—wha—what's the matter?" stammered McCabe, as he felt himself going down to the ground without the least exertion on his part.

"'Sh!" cautioned the detective. "Don't speak a word—don't move! Thar's a boat comin' this way, an' it's almost hyur! Listen! Don't ye hear it?"

Yes, McCabe and the Irish boy both heard it now, and very distinctly, too. It was the measured dip of a paddle in the water, and it was apparently drawing nigh with great rapidity. Indeed, the canoe—for a canoe it certainly was—had approached almost within sight before even Nick Robbins had discovered its proximity.

In a moment they heard the boat strike the shore. Then they fairly held their breath as they waited for the occupants to land. Soon two dark forms sprung upon the bank—only two, and they wore the plumes and scanty apparel of Indians!

One of them, however, as he stood revealed in the dim starlight, was instantly known to be a white man. More—he was recognized as that fiendish outlaw, Simon Girty!

"Hell and furies!" growled the renegade, stamping his foot, "this has been a pretty night's work. I don't believe more than half of my braves effected their escape. In fact, I'm sure they didn't. Curse that man, McCabe! If I had him here I'd wring his neck, for I believe he has played me false!"

This was all that was heard. The next moment Simon Girty and the Indian had plunged into the woods and were gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAGED!

"THAT wur a lucky escape fur you, old hoss," said Nick Robbins, as the three lurkers came out of their concealment. "Simon Girty have got it into his head 'ut ye're false, an' ef he'd ketched ye hyur it 'ud went kinder hard with ye I take it."

"Curse it!" hissed McCabe; "everything is going wrong, just at the time that I thought success certain!"

"Wal, I wouldn't take it to heart in that style," laughed Robbins, patting him on the shoulder. "Cheer up, an' be yerself ag'in. It's true the red-skins have been nicely licked by the pale-faces, an' the hull gang scattered to the four winds, but it don't foller 'ut the jig's up."

"Don't it?" snarled McCabe. "I should like to know what remains to be done, but to go home? I presume you will follow Girty now, and leave me to pursue my way alone."

"Thar's jest whar ye're wrong," said the hunter. "I won't leave yer till mornin' nobow, an' I tells ye once fur all, the jig ain't up! True, as I said afore, the reds have been licked and run away—true, Girty jest now come to shore, an' made off like the devil wur arter him—true, we're left hyur alone to fight our own battles, but, fur all that, I repeat, *the jig ain't up!*"

"Do explain yourself," said McCabe, seeing something in the hunter's mind worth drawing out.

Taking McCabe aside, out of Mike's hearing, Nick proceeded to unfold his scheme. It was to go over to the island, and, in the capacity of friends who came to render assistance, to so arrange affairs as to get Isabel separated from the men, and thus secure her by abduction. Nick "played his hand" so skillfully as to awaken McCabe's enthusiasm, under the influence of which he revealed his entire proceedings to secure his prize, confessing to the firing of Trafford's house and laughing at his subsequent conduct and performances. Nick laughed with him, encouraging his confidence, and then revealed to the astonished scoundrel the fact that he, Nick, in his capacity of detective, had seen the whole proceeding, but he added:

"Now, my boy, we understand one another fully, so let us work the thing to the eend. I'm with yer and the gal, an' ef we don't play a mighty poor hand we'll win her yet and make the settlements howl, we will. So let's be off at once in Girty's canoe, which he has left so convenient for us."

"As you say: I'm in with you," and soon the canoe, with the three adventurers, was out in the stream, heading for the island, openly, so that the Moreland party might see and recognize them as friends.

Landing on the upper end, they cautiously explored the locality, but found no trace of the party. Then Nick led the way further from the shore, into the dense undergrowth. A glade was found where the darkness was less dark, and when Nick, placing his fingers to his mouth, gave

vent to a soft, tremulous whistle, as if he were signaling to some one.

This surprised Jim McCabe not a little. With a vague suspicion flashing over his mind, he was about to demand an explanation, but before he could utter a word he staggered backward with a gasp of dismay! There was a rushing sound in the underbrush near by, mingled with the tramp of many feet. Then there was a clamor of voices, and the next instant dark forms began to pour out of the woods on both sides, and gathered around him. Harsh voices cursed him. Rough, bearded faces were thrust close to his; words of dire meaning were hissed in his ears; eyes that spoke of vengeance gleamed upon him, and then a dozen strong hands seized him and bore him to the earth!

There was a brief struggle; and when it was over, Jim McCabe lay helpless upon the ground, bound hand and foot!

Lying there on his back, the now thoroughly-terrified villain looked up to see who his captors were. The first ones he noticed were old Kirby Kidd and his Indian friend, Wapawah. Then, running his eyes further round the circle, he observed the twelve stalwart, well-armed men who had been sent with the emigrants as an escort, and was surprised to see that their number was not in the least diminished by the attack of the savages. Among them stood Nick Robbins, looking as cool and unconcerned as ever, with Mike Terry by his side. Apart from the crowd he saw Mr. Moreland and his amiable wife, together with their daughter, Isabel, and near them stood a never-to-be-forgotten individual in a swallow-tailed blue and high-crowned hat. It was the Yankee clock-vender, Jonathan Boggs, "all the way from Maine."

Jim McCabe groaned aloud, and his heart sunk within him as he read his fate in the pitiless faces above him. He knew he was now known in his true character to all of these men, and that he was their *prisoner!*

Nick Robbins stepped out of the crowd, and, looking calmly down on the prostrate man, said:

"Wal, old hoss, how-d'ye like yer new position? Them stuns make rather a hard bed, don't they? Kinder guess ye didn't think ye had sech a big audience when ye wur tellin' me that nice little story o' yourn. Yander's the gal ye've been tryin' to captur'. Why don't ye jump up and run off with her? Ha! ha! ha! Reckon ye recollects how I come over hyur this arternoon to throw this party off tha'r guard, so't Simon Girty an' his reds could extarminate 'em? Wal, I not only put the fellers on tha'r guard, but also told 'em to hide tha'rselves when they should see you an' me comin', so't they could all hear yer secret as I pumped it out o' yer."

"Yas," said Kirby Kidd, "an' mold me into buckshot ef that wa'n't a fine trick o' yourn, whar ye burnt Doc Trafford in his bed to git rid of his nephew."

"I'll swan tew man, mister, you look oncomfortable!" exclaimed Jonathan Boggs, coming forward. "Why, I'm slightly acquainted with you, ain't I?" he added, after a close look at the man. "Dew tell! Now, it's too bad I can't

help you, but I'm bound tew own up that you got yourself into the diffikilty. As Tabitha Simpson used tew say, 'there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.'"

There was a general laugh at this, and more than one of the men followed it up with a rude *jeu d'esprit* at the prisoner's expense.

McCabe foamed with rage, and tugged at the cords that bound him until they cut into his flesh, swearing furiously the while, and calling down fearful maledictions on the heads of all present. He cursed himself, too, for trusting so blindly in the man who had led him into this trap, and vowed he would haunt Robbins if he were put to death!

"Men," said the mild voice of Mr. Moreland, "let us not taunt our prisoner, but remember the many dark sins with which his soul is burdened, and pity him."

"Yer principles is good, I make no doubt," replied Kirby Kidd; "but dog my cats ef I kin feel much pity fur the skunk."

But no one thought of disregarding the word of Mr. Moreland, and so Jim McCabe was left to the companionship of his own thoughts, which, we may well believe, were not of the pleasantest character imaginable.

A consultation was now held by the entire party. Kirby Kidd and Nick Robbins exercised their influence to its utmost, and urged Mr. Moreland to take the back track and return to his former home, instead of continuing his journey down the river. Mr. Moreland had been thinking of this step for some hours, but when he thought of his daughter's misconduct he hesitated. His wife, who had been growing more and more sick at thought of leaving their home and friends forever, put in a timely word while he wavered, whispering that there were better and more convenient ways by which their child might be guided into the path of right. He saw the soundness of the arguments employed, and soon yielded, quietly expressing his determination to go back home and remain there in future.

So, without more ado, the boats were drawn out of their hiding-place under the drooping willows, and, after laying Jim McCabe in the bottom of one of them, the party embarked for home. The paddles were dipped, and the little fleet started off up the river, Kirby Kidd and Wapawah taking the lead in their canoe, while Nick Robbins and Mike Terry brought up the rear in theirs.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CLOCK-PEDDLER'S TRANSFORMATION.

ON the following morning our party of voyagers arrived safely at their destination. The men had used their oars so steadily during the night that, by dawn, they were near enough home to have no fears in finishing their journey by daylight.

As they disembarked and approached the settlement, the people came out in crowds to meet them, all surprised beyond measure to see the Morelands coming back so soon, but doubly astonished when they saw Jim McCabe among them a bound and guarded prisoner. Great was the confusion, and numerous the inquiries put to the returned voyagers. But so many

questions could not be answered at once, and, answering none, our friends moved on with their captive until they reached the wide clearing just without the fort, where the execution of Russell Trafford had taken place. Here they stopped, and threw McCabe on the ground, where he lay in sullen silence, the object of wondering looks and exclamations. When something like quiet was restored, Mr. Moreland confronted the crowd and explained to them, in a few words, that which they were clamoring to be informed. He told them that the cause of their return was the discovery that McCabe was the real murderer of Doctor Trafford, who had been burned alive in his own house a short time back, and, for which assassination the victim's nephew had been compelled to suffer. He also told them that the profligate was the friend and ally of that notorious renegade, Simon Girty, and related how the two fiends had hatched a plot to surprise and butcher the party on the island. Then he went on to explain how all this had been found out by the bold and cunning hunter, Nick Robbins; how the latter had dogged him with a perseverance worthy of the cause—thwarted his purpose by the utmost daring and coolness—and led him into a trap, where he exposed the secret of his crime in the hearing of the emigrant party.

Mr. Moreland held the attention of his audience enchained while he was speaking, and his clear, calm voice was the only one to be heard throughout the recital. But no sooner had he finished than the storm broke. Yells of rage made the welkin ring, and, wild with excitement, the men rushed to the spot where the helpless prisoner lay, as though they would annihilate him without a moment's warning. Shouts of, "Shoot him!" "Knife him!" "String him up!" "Here's a rope!" etc., were clamorously indulged in. There was scarcely a man present who did not recall the last words of Russell Trafford, as he spoke from the scaffold, and realize that an innocent man had been put to death! The revelation maddened the honest settlers, most of whom had been firm friends of the young man, and, as they thought of the awful mistake they had committed, self-reproach did not satisfy them.

In all likelihood the defenseless captive would have been violently dealt with, but for the timely interference of Mr. Moreland, Kirby Kidd and several others, who interposed their bodies and commanded the crowd to move back.

"Men," shouted Mr. Moreland, "for the sake of heaven calm yourselves, and wait until you hear all. If you harm the fellow in his present helpless condition, you will regret afterward that you did not wait. No punishment is too bad for the wretch, but, whatever is done to him let it be done with due deliberation, remembering the sad result of our hastiness on a former occasion."

This partially quelled the disturbance. The excited men moved slowly back, though not without murmurs of disapprobation, and more than one deadly weapon was shaken threateningly at McCabe, as they widened the circle around him. The exposure of the fellow's villainy seemed to have maddened them. To think that he had been living peaceably among them—

he, a confederate of Simon Girty, and the murderer of Doctor Trafford—he, who had caused them to make the awful mistake of hanging an innocent man in his stead! Indeed, it was enough to infuriate them.

"It has been irrefragably proved to us," continued Mr. Moreland, "that our prisoner is guilty of that dark deed, for which we have caused one of our noblest and most inoffensive young men to suffer the worst punishment of the law, but, for all that, we can not see him unjustly dealt with. Whatever we do, I repeat, let us do it in the full possession of our senses. Give him a fair trial. Here's a boy, the cousin of the prisoner, who has something to say that is quite important."

As he spoke he lifted Mike Terry above the heads of the assembly, and placed him on his shoulder, that he might be seen and heard by all. At first the boy could not utter a word, but after several attempts he found his voice, and began. There was profound silence while he spoke. He gave his evidence in a remarkably clear and straightforward manner, nor faltered when he observed the black looks that were bestowed upon him, as he told of the part he had taken in the destruction of his master's life. But as soon as he finished he burst into tears, and told them to hang him if they wanted to, as he deserved it. Mr. Moreland placed him on the ground again, and whispered a few comforting words in his ear, assuring him that he should not be harmed.

To the surprise of all, Jonathan Boggs, from Maine, now stepped out before the people, and cleared his throat as if he were about to make a tremendous speech!

He looked around on the many faces that were turned upon him, with all the gravity and grandeur of a renowned orator. He took a large handkerchief from his pocket, pushed his hat back from his forehead, wiped his face and blowed his nose. Then, clasping his hands behind him, he again cleared his throat, and once more swept his eyes over the staring multitude.

This was too much for those whose susceptibility of titillation was not entirely drowned by the general excitement and anger, and there was an outburst of boisterous laughter at the Yankee's expense. Some cried, "Give him air!" others, "Don't crowd the speaker!" while a shrill, piping voice demanded:

"Why don't he take off his hat and stand on it, so't we can all see him?"

These and similar sallies were aimed at the luckless New-Englander, and the boys, taking it up, began to hoot at him most unmercifully, one mischievous urchin making so bold as to slip forward and pull one of his long coat tails.

But all this did not drive Jonathan Boggs from his position. Raising one hand, he commanded, sternly:

"Silence! Hold your goll darned tongues till you know what you are laughin' at!"

Strange to say, these words served the purpose. The noisy ones immediately became quiet, and taking advantage of the lull, the clock-vender resumed:

"Hearken unto me, and weigh well my ejaculations. I appear before you this morning to deliver a most important address—or, rayther,

undress—but, ef you don't listen, how in the name of Tabitha Simpson do you expect to hear? Look at me! Gaze on me! I'm goin' to open your eyes with wonder, and relieve your minds of the erroneous conviction that you have hung a man through mistake. Watch my movements, ladies and gentlemen, and *mark the transformation!*"

Before any one could divine his intention the Yankee had grasped his swallow-tailed coat by each lapel, and thrown it off, dropping it upon the ground. Then he made another quick movement, and off went the tall, bell-crowned hat, accompanied by a mass of tow-colored hair, and followed by several smaller "fixin's" that completed the disguise. In less time than it takes to tell it, all that remained of Jonathan Boggs lay in a small heap on the ground!

In his place stood—who but Russell Trafford!

The effect of this transformation on the throng of settlers who witnessed it, may be more easily imagined than described. Everybody in the settlement knew that ludicrous specimen of the Maine Yankee, known by the name of Jonathan Boggs, and to see him change himself into a man whom they had never expected to see again on earth—no wonder every tongue was paralyzed, every form petrified.

For a full minute it was thus. A silence like that of the tomb hung over the spot. It seemed as if the people would never recover from the effects of their amazement. Russell Trafford stood before them, as natural as life, his fine form drawn up to its full height, and a smile playing over his handsome features as he calmly noted the result of his disclosure. And yet, how could it be he? They thought—nay, they *knew* he was dead. They had seen him hung, and had followed him to his grave. Surely no man could live after hanging as he had hung; much less leave his grave.

Young Trafford did not wait for them to recover the use of their tongues, but embraced the opportunity their silence afforded to explain to them the mystery. Lifting his rich, manly voice, he began to speak:

"Friends," he said, "I disclose myself to you to-day, knowing that I am at last out of danger, and once more free to take up my abode among you in my own name and guise. Until this hour you have supposed me guilty of the murder of my uncle, and also thought you put me to death for the same. I am still alive, as you see. You are struck dumb with amazement, but I will explain all to you in a very short time. I am not a spirit, nor am I other than he whom I now seem to be. I am Russell Trafford, in the full possession of my health. After my conviction and sentence, you all know that I was locked up in the block-house, there to be in durance vile until the day set apart for my execution. Some of you know, likewise, that during my imprisonment, Kirby Kidd and Wapawah came to the block-house and asked the privilege of a private interview with me. Their request was readily complied with, and the two scouts were shown into my cell. As soon as they were left alone with me they announced their intention to save my life, if it could possibly be done by artifice. Of course this was wholly unexpected to me, and at first I was

inclined to be incredulous. But they assured me it was no jest—they had consulted and decided, and they had determined to save me if it lay in their power to do so. Kidd declared that he would not have lifted a hand in my favor, had he thought for a moment that I was the real perpetrator of the crime; but he could not believe me guilty, and knew he was doing right in case I was innocent. He told me his services had already been solicited and engaged for executioner, and that that was vastly in our favor.

"The stratagem resorted to was this: a leather strap was fastened firmly around my shoulders, underneath my clothing, in such a manner that the noose of the rope could be easily and quickly attached to it. By this means the noose would be prevented from closing on my neck, and I would hang by my shoulders instead.

"It is needless to tell you that this plan worked to a charm, for my presence here to-day proves that it did. You will remember that it was Kirby Kidd who proposed using a death-cap, and that he furnished the article himself without consulting any one. This was to conceal my face at the last moment, so that its very lifelike appearance would not betray the unguineness of my death-struggles. At the time you thought the last breath was forced from my body, I was suspended in comparative ease, and was breathing as freely as any of you. Pretending to fear that the mob would visit some foul indignity upon my body during the night that followed, Kirby Kidd and Wapawah obtained permission to take charge of the supposed corpse, and guard it until the next day. In the dead hours of night we filled the coffin with a heavy stick of timber and some dirt, and fastened the lid securely over them. Next day the funeral services were performed over this stick of wood, with great solemnity, and almost the entire population of our village followed these remains to their last resting-place! I was kept closely hidden until my two friends procured me the disguise which I have just cast off. On the third day after my would-be execution, I made my appearance among you in the character of a Yankee clock-peddler. I went to the house of Mr. Moreland on that same day, and, finding Isabel alone, I disclosed my identity to her, and explained all. I did not deem it safe to impart the secret to her parents, though I think they had faith in my innocence.

"Isabel promised to meet me that night out in the glade where they had made the grave for me. There I could lay aside my disguise and meet her as of old. At a pretty late hour I repaired to the appointed place, accompanied by Kidd, Wapawah and Robbins, who were to keep watch and warn us if anybody should chance to come that way during the few short moments of our tryst. These three men stationed themselves in the edge of the woods, while Isabel and I stood by the new-made grave and conversed. It seems that this fellow, McCabe, was hanging about the place at the same time. How he approached without attracting the attention of the guards it is impossible to tell, but he did it somehow or other, unless he was there before our arrival. The first intimation we had of his presence was a loud oath, followed by a vow

that somebody should die if he had a hundred lives! I presume the "somebody" was myself, for the next instant he came bounding toward me with pistol in hand. Kirby Kidd was too quick for him, however, and caught him by the collar before mischief could be done. While the scouts claimed his attention, the lady and I quickly ensconced ourselves in a large hollow tree that stood near by, and after trying to make him believe he had seen nothing, they let him depart. We continued our meeting there night after night. I knew the nature of McCabe too well to believe that he would subject himself to ridicule by asserting that he had seen Russel Trafford, when everybody would have sworn that I was dead. So we did not change our trysting-place. Sometimes the three hunters would accompany us, but they were often absent from the fort and could not.

"We did not know that anybody besides McCabe ever saw us there together, but you all know that a report got afloat that Isabel was meeting a stranger in the woods almost every night. Isabel herself was ignorant of the existence of this report until the very last moment on the evening that she was to be taken away from her home. Noble and self-sacrificing as ever, she suffered herself to be traduced rather than betray me. That night, after the Morelands had gone to the river to embark on their brief voyage, Isabel returned to the house on pretense of having forgotten some small article. Her object in thus deceiving her parents was to keep her appointment with me, and to tell me that she was going away—which she did. But it so fell out that McCabe was again lurking about the glade that evening, and he saw us as we sat side by side on the grave. He discharged a rifle at us, but the ball went wide of the mark, and, under cover of the smoke, we ran to the hollow tree that stands on the edge of the glade, and hastily concealed ourselves in its ample cavity. He searched for us for some time, but in vain. For fear he would find us, I quickly donned my disguise and went forth from my hiding-place, to throw him off the track. As Jonathan Boggs I confronted him, and made him believe they were imaginary beings he had seen. When he was gone Isabel joined me, and together we went to the river where her parents were awaiting her. I obtained permission to make one of the emigrant-party, and that is all I have to tell."

For a moment after this explanation was ended that deep silence continued. Then Mrs. Moreland clasped her wronged daughter in her arms and began to weep hysterically, while the former friends of the noble girl went forward to crave her pardon, and offer her their congratulations.

This was but a signal for the men. In an instant cheer after cheer rent the air, and the hardy settlers rushed forward in a body. Lifting Russell Trafford upon their shoulders, they bore him round the spot with shouts of joy, and the wildest confusion reigned. A great many, among whom was Mr. Moreland, shook the hands of Kirby Kidd, Nick Robbins and the Wyandott until the arms of the three champions ached from wrist to shoulder.

The tumult soon subsided. Then Russell, after

thanking all for their manifestations of renewed friendship, joined the Moreland family and received the blessings of his future parents-in-law. Isabel was once more smiling and happy, and among those who had looked upon her with scorn a few days before, not one asked her forgiveness in vain. Her dark, luminous eyes beamed with unutterable love and tenderness upon her affianced husband, and the rich color stained her beautiful face and neck as she drew her arm through his, and began to walk up and down in the background.

As soon as an opportunity offered, Nick Robbins stepped forward to address the people. All guessed at once that he had something of importance to say, though none could imagine what it was. Every tongue was hushed, and every ear opened, as the grim old hunter took his position. He gazed blankly at his audience for a moment, and then began to speak.

"I ain't got much to say," he said, leaning on his rifle, "but I reckon ye won't spect much from sech as me. I'm goin' to open your peepers ag'in, same as the young feller did. I don't like to see ye surprised so powerful bad, but then I calc'late the shock'll be a leetle milder this time, 'cause ye'r' gettin' used to it. Prepare yerselves now ter see somethin' wonderful, an' don't git it into yer noddles 'ut ye'r' in fairy-land, or any sech outlandish place."

As he uttered the last words he dropped his gun, and straightened up. To the astonishment of the lookers-on he then snatched off his coon-skin cap, together with a wig of long hair and the bandage that had covered his eye! Next he removed the patch from his cheek, the coarse red beard from his chin, and then he quickly threw off his buckskin garments.

In a single instant Nick Robbins had vanished, and *Doctor Trafford stood revealed before the crowd!*

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

FOR a moment the people stood aghast at this second revelation. But it was only for a moment. The startling transformation of Jonathan Boggs into Russell Trafford had prepared them for almost any change of this description. When the first shock of surprise was over, the loud, prolonged cheers burst forth again, and shouts and screams of joy, amazement and congratulations, once more filled the air. The excited pioneers gathered round the smiling doctor, as he pleasantly exchanged salutations with one after another, and a hundred inquiries were propounded to him in such rapid succession that he found it impossible to answer any. The ugly, expressionless face of Nick Robbins, the hunter, was gone, and in its place was the very expressive and finely-cut features of Doctor Trafford, the man whom all had supposed to be long since dead burned alive in his bed.

The confusion of voices still continued, until the doctor requested the crowd to fall back, and be still, that he might tell them what they were clamoring to know.

The request answered the purpose. They widened the space around the doctor, and quiet was once more restored.

"You need not stare at me as though I were

superhuman," began the doctor. "I can explain to you clearly how it happened that I am still alive, and how you were so easily deceived. On the night of the fire, and supposed tragedy, I was not in the house at all. It was about the hour of midnight, as you must recollect, and, being unable to sleep, I had gone out to take a stroll in the open air, which some of you know I frequently did. To be sure my chamber-door was locked, as Mike Terry reported to McCabe, but that need not seem strange. I, being a prime old bachelor, never left the house without first locking the door of my private apartment, as I could never bear the thought of having my things disturbed in my absence.

"After walking about until my nerves were so settled that I thought I should have no further difficulty in winning the spirit of sleep, I bent my steps toward home. But my approach was checked by the sight of somebody prowling around the house. At first I thought it was my nephew, the manner of his dress giving me the impression, but his singular actions speedily convinced me that I was mistaken. I stood and watched the man with some curiosity, wondering what he meant by sneaking around my cabin at that late hour. He went clear around the house in a stooping posture, and when he arrived at the point where I had first seen him, he turned and ran away at the top of his speed. He came straight toward the spot where I was standing. Moved by a sudden impulse, I jumped behind a tree to let him pass without discovering me. The man approached swiftly on tiptoe. I heard him breathing hard, as if with excitement, as he came up. Somewhat to my alarm he stopped within three feet of my hiding place, and looked back. This pause in his flight was of scarcely more than a moment's duration, but that was enough. Within that moment I distinctly heard him say:

"It is done—it is done! Doctor Trafford will never leave that house alive! The deed will be imputed to his upstart of a nephew, and my purpose will be accomplished!"

"The next instant he was gone. I had not recognized the fellow, nor his voice, nor had I time to follow him before he was out of sight. A light, flashing in my face, startled me. I looked toward my cabin, and saw that it was in flames. I guessed the truth at once. The unknown had set fire to the building for the purpose of burning me in my bed. The words I had heard fall from his mouth convinced me of this fact, and, as I reflected, I began to suspect that the would-be-murderer was Jim McCabe. I could not think that this man had any direct cause to attempt my life, but I knew that Russell was his rival in love, and I thought it quite probable that he had chosen this circuitous way of getting rid of his rival. The prowler had said, in my hearing, that I could not escape with my life—that my nephew would receive the penalty of the deed—and that thus his purpose would be accomplished. This led me to believe that the blow was aimed at Russell, after all, indirect as it was.

"By this time there was an uproar all around me, and people were pouring out of their homes to see the fire. I saw them gathering around the burning structure, but I did not move. An

idea struck me. I hastily decided to steal away from the fort, and leave you all to suppose that I was really roasted alive in my own house. Then I could return in disguise, and as detective hunt out the real perpetrator of that night's work, nor make myself known until I had proved his guilt. I went. By careful maneuvering I managed to get outside of the stockade unseen, the sentry at the gate having temporarily deserted his post at the alarm of fire. Once beyond the limits of the fort, I felt that my flight was well commenced. I then struck out in a southerly direction, and traveled many, many weary miles toward the interior.

"At last I came upon a solitary but in the woods. I found it occupied by a good-natured old hunter, who gave me rest, shelter and food. Luckily, I had met with the right man, for the old hunter furnished me with this disguise, with which I have deceived you all.

Having assumed the appearance of an old rover of the forest, and the name of Nick Robbins, I returned to this place. I arrived here at the very hour that my nephew was to be executed. I was astonished, and thought at first that I would have to reveal myself in order to save him. But I did not. You will remember that I ascended the scaffold, and talked with Kirby Kidd. He told me of the artifice resorted to by which they hoped to save Russell's life, and on hearing that, I concluded to wear my disguise yet longer.

"When the hanging affair was over, I consigned myself assiduously to the task of detective, watching McCabe, and clearing the name of my innocent ward. How I succeeded in my self-imposed mission you have been told. During all, only four persons, besides myself, knew that I was other than what I seemed; those four were Kirby Kidd and his Indian friend, Isabel Moreland and my nephew."

"That 'ere's all very fine, Doc, but how the de'il are you goin' to account for the skeleton we found in the ruins of your house?" asked a raw-boned individual.

Doctor Trafford smiled.

"Why, sir," he replied, "isn't it quite natural that one of my profession should have a human skeleton in his house? Moreover, had the bones been mine, it is hardly probable that the flesh would have been entirely consumed by the fire."

This settled that point.

Now Jim McCabe once more became the center of attraction. Some of the most vengeful cried out clamorously for his blood, and the majority were in favor of hanging him on the spot, without any ceremony whatever. But Mr. Moreland earnestly remonstrated against such a proceeding.

At this juncture, however, an incident occurred that put an end to the disagreement. All the time that the revelations and explanations were chaining the attention of the whole crowd, Jim McCabe had been struggling desperately with the cords that bound him. Nobody had noticed him, and, by the time Doctor Trafford finished his story, he ceased his squirming and lay perfectly quiet.

All of a sudden he sprang to his feet with the agility of a panther, and bounded into the open

space in the midst of the crowd. Here he stood, with limbs entirely free, glaring about him at the mass of people on every side, his face deadly pale, his eyes bloodshot and his nostrils distended.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he screamed, "did you think I would become an easy victim to the tortures you propose to inflict upon me? I *did* set fire to the house of Doctor Trafford, and it *was* for the purpose of having his nephew die by the hand of the law. What of it? I shall deny nothing, nor shall I attempt to escape your vengeance. But, hark ye! I shall not go alone. There is one here who must go with me across the dark river!"

He whirled round, as he concluded his wild speech, and stood face to face with Russell Trafford! Thrusting his hand into his breast, he drew forth a glittering dagger, and flourished it over his head with a maniacal yell.

Then, before anybody could make an effort to detain the maddened brute, he crouched down and made a flying leap toward young Trafford. For a single instant his bending form was suspended in mid-air—the next it fell sprawling on the grass at the feet of the man he had intended to kill! Almost before he touched the ground Jim McCabe was dead!

Then there were screams of affright from the females, mingled with shouts of surprise and alarm from the males, and scores of excited men crowded around the fallen wretch. Every one seemed struck with a feeling akin to awe by the sad spectacle, and a profound silence ensued. It was broken at length by the deep, solemn voice of Mr. Moreland, saying:

"God have mercy on his soul!"

But who had fired the fatal shot? The question though unuttered, seemed to strike the whole party at once, and all as of one accord, turned their eyes to see which of their number had won the honor of saving a fellow-creature's life. Who can describe their astonishment and admiration when they beheld Mike Terry standing a few yards away, with a smoking pistol in his hand! *He* it was who had snatched Russell Trafford from the very jaws of a horrible death. The young man stepped up to him, seized him by the hand and said, with much feeling:

"God bless you, Mike! You have done a noble act, and proved yourself a true-hearted fellow after all."

A great many others echoed these words, and the Irish boy was the hero of the hour. The body of the miserable wretch, Jim McCabe, was now borne away, and, shortly after, the crowd dispersed, and the people sought their different homes, there to amuse and remark on the extraordinary events that had occurred in their midst.

Subsequently Doctor Trafford erected another and much larger cabin on the spot where the first one had stood, and Mike Terry was once more installed in his service, now more loved and trusted than ever before. Russell and Isabel lived long and happily together, and in after years were wont to gather their children's children upon their knees and tell the story of Nick Robbins, the hunter detective.

THE END.

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